

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

BY THE

SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

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VOL. I.

PART I.

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SPIRIT OF THE AGE;

OR,

CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS.

BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.

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“ To know another well, were to know one's-self.”

VOL. I.

PARIS,

PUBLISHED BY A. AND W. GALIGNANI,

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VOL. I.

PARIS.

PUBLISHED BY A. AND W. GALLONNI,

AT THE SIGN OF THE SHEEP, IN THE RUE DE LA HARPE, NEAR THE
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1825.

THE
SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

LORD BYRON.

LORD BYRON and Sir Walter Scott are among writers now living* the two, who would carry away a majority of suffrages as the greatest geniuses of the age. The former would, perhaps, obtain the preference with the fine gentlemen and ladies (squeamishness apart)—the latter with the critics and the vulgar.

* This Essay was written just before Lord Byron's death.

We shall treat of them in the same connection, partly on account of their distinguished pre-eminence, and partly because they afford a complete contrast to each other. In their poetry, in their prose, in their politics, and in their tempers, no two men can be more unlike.

If Sir Walter Scott may be thought by some to have been

“Born universal heir to all humanity,”

it is plain Lord Byron can set up no such pretension. He is, in a striking degree, the creature of his own will. He holds no communion with his kind; but stands alone, without mate or fellow—

“As if a man were author of himself,
And owned no other kin.”

He is like a solitary peak, all access to which is cut off not more by elevation than distance. He is seated on a lofty eminence, “cloud-capt,” or reflecting the last rays of setting suns; and in his poetical moods, reminds us of the fabled Titans, retired to a ridgy steep, play-

ing on their Pan's-pipes, and taking up ordinary men and things in their hands with haughty indifference. He raises his subject to himself, or tramples on it: he neither stoops to, nor loses himself in it. He exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy. He scorns all things, even himself. Nature must come to him to sit for her picture—he does not go to her. She must consult his time, his convenience, and his humour; and wear a *sombre* or a fantastic garb, or his Lordship turns his back upon her. There is no ease, no unaffected simplicity of manner, no “golden mean.” All is strained, or petulant in the extreme. His thoughts are sphered and crystalline; his style “prouder than when blue Iris bends;” his spirit fiery, impatient, wayward, indefatigable. Instead of taking his impressions from without, in entire and almost unimpaired masses, he moulds them according to his own temperament, and heats the materials of his imagination in the furnace of his passions.—Lord Byron's verse glows like a flame, consuming every thing in its way; Sir Walter Scott's glides like a river, clear, gentle,

harmless. The poetry of the first scorches, that of the last scarcely warms. The light of the one proceeds from an internal source, ensanguined, sullen, fixed; the other reflects the hues of Heaven, or the face of nature, glancing vivid and various. The productions of the Northern Bard have the rust and the freshness of antiquity about them; those of the Noble Poet cease to startle from their extreme ambition of novelty, both in style and matter. Sir Walter's rhymes are "silly sooth"—

" And dally with the innocence of thought,
Like the old age"—

his Lordship's Muse spurns *the olden time*, and affects all the supercilious airs of a modern fine lady and an upstart. The object of the one writer is to restore us to truth and nature: the other chiefly thinks how he shall display his own power, or vent his spleen, or astonish the reader either by starting new subjects and trains of speculation, or by expressing old ones in a more striking and emphatic manner than they have been expressed before. He

cares little what it is he says, so that he can say it differently from others. This may account for the charges of plagiarism which have been repeatedly brought against the Noble Poet—if he can borrow an image or sentiment from another, and heighten it by an epithet or an allusion of greater force and beauty than is to be found in the original passage, he thinks he shows his superiority of execution in this in a more marked manner than if the first suggestion had been his own. It is not the value of the observation itself he is solicitous about; but he wishes to shine by contrast—even nature only serves as a foil to set off his style. He therefore takes the thoughts of others (whether contemporaries or not) out of their mouths, and is content to make them his own, to set his stamp upon them, by imparting to them a more meretricious gloss, a higher relief, a greater loftiness of tone, and a characteristic inveteracy of purpose. Even in those collateral ornaments of modern style, slovenliness, abruptness, and eccentricity (as well as in terseness and significance), Lord Byron, when he pleases, defies

competition and surpasses all his contemporaries. Whatever he does, he must do in a more decided and daring manner than any one else—he lounges with extravagance, and yawns so as to alarm the reader! Self-will, passion, the love of singularity, a disdain of himself and of others (with a conscious sense that this is among the ways and means of procuring admiration), are the proper categories of his mind: he is a lordly writer, is above his own reputation, and condescends to the Muses with a scornful grace!

Lord Byron, who in his politics is a *liberal*, in his genius is haughty and aristocratic: Walter Scott, who is an aristocrat in principle, is popular in his writings, and is (as it were) equally *servile* to nature and to opinion. The genius of Sir Walter is essentially imitative, or “denotes a foregone conclusion:” that of Lord Byron is self-dependent; or at least requires no aid, is governed by no law, but the impulses of its own will. We confess, however much we may admire independence of feeling and erectness of spirit in general or practical questions, yet in works of genius we

prefer him who bows to the authority of nature, who appeals to actual objects, to mouldering superstitions, to history, observation, and tradition, before him who only consults the pragmatical and restless workings of his own breast, and gives them out as oracles to the world. We like a writer (whether poet or prose-writer) who takes in (or is willing to take in) the range of half the universe in feeling, character, description, much better than we do one who obstinately and invariably shuts himself up in the Bastile of his own ruling passions. In short, we had rather be Sir Walter Scott (meaning thereby the Author of *Waverley*) than Lord Byron, a hundred times over. And for the reason just given, namely, that he casts his descriptions in the mould of nature, ever-varying, never tiresome, always interesting and always instructive, instead of casting them constantly in the mould of his own individual impressions. He gives us man as he is, or as he was, in almost every variety of situation, action, and feeling. Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious

tyrant, the other a yielding slave ; he gives us the misanthrope and the voluptuary by turns ; and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting centos of himself. He hangs the cloud, the film of his existence over all outward things—sits in the centre of his thoughts, and enjoys dark night, bright day, the glitter and the gloom, “in cell monastic”—we see the mournful pall, the crucifix, the death’s heads, the faded chaplet of flowers, the gleaming tapers, the agonized brow of genius, the wasted form of beauty—but we are still imprisoned in a dungeon, a curtain intercepts our view, we do not breathe freely the air of nature or of our own thoughts—the other admired author draws aside the curtain, and the veil of egotism is rent, and he shows us the crowd of living men and women, the endless groups, the landscape back-ground, the cloud and the rainbow, and enriches our imaginations and relieves one passion by another, and expands and lightens reflection, and takes away that tightness at the breast which arises from thinking or wishing to think

that there is nothing in the world out of a man's self!—In this point of view, the Author of *Waverley* is one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived, by emancipating the mind from petty, narrow, and bigoted prejudices : Lord Byron is the greatest pamperer of those prejudices, by seeming to think there is nothing else worth encouraging but the seeds or the full luxuriant growth of dogmatism and self-conceit. In reading the *Scotch Novels*, we never think about the author, except from a feeling of curiosity respecting our unknown benefactor : in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds. The colouring of Lord Byron's style, however rich and dipped in Tyrian dyes, is nevertheless opaque, is in itself an object of delight and wonder : Sir Walter Scott's is perfectly transparent. In studying the one, you seem to gaze at the figures cut in stained glass, which exclude the view beyond, and where the pure light of Heaven is only a means of setting off the gorgeousness of art : in reading the other, you look through a noble window at the clear and varied landscape without. Or to sum up

the distinction in one word, Sir Walter Scott is the most *dramatic* writer now living; and Lord Byron is the least so. It would be difficult to imagine that the Author of Waverley is in the smallest degree a pedant; as it would be hard to persuade ourselves that the author of Childe Harold and Don Juan is not a coxcomb, though a provoking and sublime one. In this decided preference given to Sir Walter Scott over Lord Byron, we distinctly include the prose-works of the former; for we do not think his poetry alone by any means entitles him to that precedence. Sir Walter in his poetry, though pleasing and natural, is a comparative trifler: it is in his anonymous productions that he has shown himself for what he is!—

Intensity is the great and prominent distinction of Lord Byron's writings. He seldom gets beyond force of style; nor has he produced any regular work or masterly whole. He does not prepare any plan beforehand, nor revise and retouch what he has written with polished accuracy. His only object seems to be to stimulate himself and his readers for the mo-

ment—to keep both alive, to drive away *ennui*, to substitute a feverish and irritable state of excitement for listless indolence or even calm enjoyment. For this purpose he pitches on any subject at random without much thought or delicacy—he is only impatient to begin—and takes care to adorn and enrich it as he proceeds with “thoughts that breathe and words that burn.” He composes (as he himself has said) whether he is in the bath, in his study, or on horseback—he writes as habitually as others talk or think—and whether we have the inspiration of the Muse or not, we always find the spirit of the man of genius breathing from his verse. He grapples with his subject, and moves, penetrates, and animates it by the electric force of his own feelings. He is often monotonous, extravagant, offensive; but he is never dull, or tedious, but when he writes prose. Lord Byron does not exhibit a new view of nature, or raise insignificant objects into importance by the romantic associations with which he surrounds them; but generally (at least) takes common-place thoughts and events, and endeavours to express

them in stronger and statelier language than others. His poetry stands like a Martello tower by the side of his subject. He does not, like Mr. Wordsworth, lift poetry from the ground, or create a sentiment out of nothing. He does not describe a daisy or a periwinkle, but the cedar or the cypress : not “poor men’s cottages, but princes’ palaces.” His *Childe Harold* contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history, of the mighty objects left as wrecks of time, but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every school-boy ; has brought out few new traits of feeling or thought ; and has done no more than justice to the reader’s preconceptions by the sustained force and brilliancy of his style and imagery.

Lord Byron’s earlier productions, *Lara*, the *Corsair*, etc. were wild and gloomy romances, put into rapid and shining verse. They discover the madness of poetry, together with the inspiration : sullen, moody, capricious, fierce, inexorable, gloating on beauty, thirsting for revenge, hurrying from the extremes of pleasure to pain, but with

nothing permanent, nothing healthy or natural. The gaudy decorations and the morbid sentiments remind one of flowers strewed over the face of death ! In his *Childe Harold* (as has been just observed) he assumes a lofty and philosophic tone, and “ reasons high of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate.” He takes the highest points in the history of the world, and comments on them from a more commanding eminence : he shows us the crumbling monuments of time, he invokes the great names, the mighty spirit of antiquity. The universe is changed into a stately mausoleum :—in solemn measures he chaunts a hymn to fame. Lord Byron has strength and elevation enough to fill up the mould of our classical and time-hallowed recollections, and to rekindle the earliest aspirations of the mind after greatness and true glory with a pen of fire. The names of Tasso, of Ariosto, of Dante, of Cincinnatus, of Cæsar, of Scipio, lose nothing of their pomp or their lustre in his hands, and when he begins and continues a strain of panegyric on such subjects, we indeed sit down

with him to a banquet of rich praise, brooding
over imperishable glories,

“ Till Contemplation has her fill.”

Lord Byron seems to cast himself indignantly from “this bank and shoal of time,” or the frail tottering bark that bears up modern reputation, into the huge sea of ancient renown, and to revel there with untired, outspread plume. Even this in him is spleen—his contempt of his contemporaries makes him turn back to the lustrous past, or project himself forward to the dim future!—Lord Byron’s tragedies, *Faliero*,* *Sardanapalus*, etc. are not equal to his other works. They want the essence of the drama. They abound in speeches and descriptions, such as he himself might make either to himself or others, lolling on his couch of a morning, but do not carry the reader out of the poet’s mind to the scenes and events recorded. They have

* “ Don Juan was my Moscow, and *Faliero*
My Leipsic, and my Mont St. Jean seems Cain.”

Don Juan, Canto XI.

neither action, character, nor interest, but are a sort of *gossamer* tragedies, spun out, and glittering, and spreading a flimsy veil over the face of nature. Yet he spins them on. Of all that he has done in this way the *Heaven and Earth* (the same subject as Mr. Moore's *Loves of the Angels*) is the best. We prefer it even to *Manfred*. *Manfred* is merely himself, with a fancy-drapery on : but in the dramatic fragment published in the *Liberal*, the space between Heaven and Earth, the stage on which his characters have to pass to and fro, seems to fill his Lordship's imagination; and the Deluge, which he has so finely described, may be said to have drowned all his own idle humours.

We must say we think little of our author's turn for satire. His "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" is dogmatical and insolent, but without refinement or point. He calls people names, and tries to transfix a character with an epithet, which does not stick, because it has no other foundation than his own petulance and spite ; or he endeavours to degrade by alluding to some circumstance of exter-

nal situation. He says of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, that "it is his aversion." That may be : but whose fault is it? This is the satire of a lord, who is accustomed to have all his whims or dislikes taken for gospel, and who cannot be at the pains to do more than signify his contempt or displeasure. If a great man meets with a rebuff which he does not like, he turns on his heel, and this passes for a repartee. The Noble Author says of a celebrated barrister and critic, that he was "born in a garret sixteen stories high." The insinuation is not true ; or if it were, it is low. The allusion degrades the person who makes, not him to whom it is applied. This is also the satire of a person of birth and quality, who measures all merit by external rank, that is, by his own standard. So his Lordship, in a "Letter to the Editor of my Grandmother's Review," addresses him fifty times as "*my dear Roberts;*" nor is there any other wit in the article. . This is surely a mere assumption of superiority from his Lordship's rank, and is the sort of *quizzing* he might use to a person who came to hire himself as a valet to him at *Long's*—the

waiters might laugh, the public will not. In like manner, in the controversy about Pope, he claps Mr. Bowles on the back with a coarse facetious familiarity, as if he were his chaplain whom he had invited to dine with him, or was about to present to a benefice. The reverend divine might submit to the obligation, but he has no occasion to subscribe to the jest. If it is a jest that Mr. Bowles should be a parson, and Lord Byron a peer, the world knew this before; there was no need to write a pamphlet to prove it.

The *Don Juan* indeed has great power; but its power is owing to the force of the serious writing, and to the oddity of the contrast between that and the flashy passages with which it is interlarded. From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step. You laugh and are surprised that any one should turn round and *travestie* himself: the drollery is in the utter discontinuity of ideas and feelings. He makes virtue serve as a foil to vice; *dandyism* is (for want of any other) a variety of genius. A classical intoxication is followed by the splashing of soda-water,

by frothy effusions of ordinary bile. After the lightning and the hurricane, we are introduced to the interior of the cabin and the contents of wash-hand basins. The solemn hero of tragedy plays *Scrub* in the farce. This is “very tolerable and not to be endured.” The Noble Lord is almost the only writer who has prostituted his talents in this way. He hallows in order to desecrate; takes a pleasure in defacing the images of beauty his hands have wrought; and raises our hopes and our belief in goodness to Heaven only to dash them to the earth again, and break them in pieces the more effectually from the very height they have fallen. Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned into a jest by the very person who has kindled it, and who thus fatally quenches the sparks of both. It is not that Lord Byron is sometimes serious and sometimes trifling, sometimes profligate, and sometimes moral—but when he is most serious and most moral, he is only preparing to mortify the unsuspecting reader by putting a pitiful *hoax* upon him. This is a most unaccountable anomaly. It is as if the eagle

were to build its eyry in a common sewer, or the owl were seen soaring to the mid-day sun. Such a sight might make one laugh, but one would not wish or expect it to occur more than once!*

In fact, Lord Byron is the spoiled child of fame as well as fortune. He has taken a surfeit of popularity, and is not contented to delight, unless he can shock the public. He would force them to admire in spite of decency and common sense—he would have them read what they would read in no one but himself, or he would not give a rush for their applause. He is to be “a chartered libertine,” from whom insults are favours, whose contempt is to be a new incentive to admiration. His Lordship is hard to please: he is equally averse to notice or neglect, enraged at censure and scorning praise. He tries the patience of the town to the very utmost, and when they show signs of weariness or disgust, threatens to *discard* them. He

* This censure applies to the first Cantos of DON JUAN much more than to the last. It has been called a TRISTRAM SHANDY in rhyme: it is rather a poem written about itself.

says he will write on, whether he is read or not. He would never write another page, if it were not to court popular applause, or to affect a superiority over it. In this respect also, Lord Byron presents a striking contrast to Sir Walter Scott. The latter takes what part of the public favour falls to his share, without grumbling (to be sure he has no reason to complain); the former is always quarrelling with the world about his *modicum* of applause, the *spolia opima* of vanity, and ungraciously throwing the offerings of incense heaped on his shrine back in the faces of his admirers. Again, there is no taint in the writings of the Author of Waverley, all is fair and natural and *above-board*: he never outrages the public mind. He introduces no anomalous character: broaches no staggering opinion. If he goes back to old prejudices and superstitions as a relief to the modern reader, while Lord Byron floats on swelling paradoxes—

“ Like proud seas under him ;”

if the one defers too much to the spirit of an-

tiquity, the other panders to the spirit of the age, goes to the very edge of extreme and licentious speculation, and breaks his neck over it. Grossness and levity are the playthings of his pen. It is a ludicrous circumstance that he should have dedicated his *Cain* to the worthy Baronet! Did the latter ever acknowledge the obligation? We are not nice, not very nice; but we do not particularly approve those subjects that shine chiefly from their rottenness: nor do we wish to see the Muses drest out in the flounces of a false or questionable philosophy, like *Portia* and *Nerissa* in the garb of Doctors of Law. We like metaphysics as well as Lord Byron; but not to see them making flowery speeches, nor dancing a measure in the fetters of verse. We have as good as hinted, that his Lordship's poetry consists mostly of a tissue of superb common-places; even his paradoxes are *common-place*. They are familiar in the schools: they are only new and striking in his dramas and stanzas, by being out of place. In a word, we think that poetry moves best within the circle of nature and received opinion: specu-

lative theory and subtle casuistry are forbidden ground to it. But Lord Byron often wanders into this ground wantonly, wilfully, and unwarrantably. The only apology we can conceive for the spirit of some of Lord Byron's writings, is the spirit of some of those opposed to him. They would provoke a man to write any thing. "Farthest from them is best." The extravagance and license of the one seems a proper antidote to the bigotry and narrowness of the other. The first *Vision of Judgment* was a set-off to the second, though

"None but itself could be its parallel."

Perhaps the chief cause of most of Lord Byron's errors is, that he is that anomaly in letters and in society, a Noble Poet. It is a double privilege, almost too much for humanity. He has all the pride of birth and genius. The strength of his imagination leads him to indulge in fantastic opinions; the elevation of his rank sets censure at defiance. He becomes a pampered egotist. He has a seat in the House of Lords, a niche in the Temple of Fame. Every-day mortals, opi-

nions, things are not good enough for him to touch or think of. A mere nobleman is, in his estimation, but “the tenth transmitter of a foolish face :” a mere man of genius is no better than a worm. His Muse is also a lady of quality. The people are not polite enough for him : the Court not sufficiently intellectual. He hates the one and despises the other. By hating and despising others, he does not learn to be satisfied with himself. A fastidious man soon grows querulous and splenetic. If there is nobody but ourselves to come up to our idea of fancied perfection, we easily get tired of our idol. When a man is tired of what he is, by a natural perversity he sets up for what he is not. If he is a poet, he pretends to be a metaphysician : if he is a patrician in rank and feeling, he would fain be one of the people. His ruling motive is not the love of the people, but of distinction—not of truth, but of singularity. He patronizes men of letters out of vanity, and deserts them from caprice, or from the advice of friends. He embarks in an obnoxious publication to provoke censure, and leaves it to shift for itself for fear of scandal. We do

not like Sir Walter's gratuitous servility : we like Lord Byron's preposterous *liberalism* little better. He may affect the principles of equality, but he resumes his privilege of peerage, upon occasion. His Lordship has made great offers of service to the Greeks—money and horses. He is at present in Cephalonia, waiting the event!

* * * * *

We had written thus far when news came of the death of Lord Byron, and put an end at once to a strain of somewhat peevish invective, which was intended to meet his eye, not to insult his memory. Had we known that we were writing his epitaph, we must have done it with a different feeling. As it is, we think it better and more like himself, to let what we had written stand, than to take up our leaden shafts, and try to melt them into "tears of sensibility," or mould them into dull praise, and an affected show of candour. We were not silent during the author's life-time, either for his reproof or encouragement(such as we could give, and *he* did not disdain to accept), nor can we now turn undertakers' men

to fix the glittering plate upon his coffin, or fall into the procession of popular woe. — Death cancels every thing but truth; and strips a man of every thing but genius and virtue. It is a sort of natural canonization. It makes the meanest of us sacred—it installs the poet in his immortality, and lifts him to the skies. Death is the great assayer of the sterling ore of talent. At his touch the drossy particles fall off, the irritable, the personal, the gross, and mingle with the dust—the finer and more ethereal part mounts with the winged spirit to watch over our latest memory and protect our bones from insult. We consign the least worthy qualities to oblivion, and cherish the nobler and imperishable nature with double pride and fondness. Nothing could show the real superiority of genius in a more striking point of view than the idle contests and the public indifference about the place of Lord Byron's interment, whether in Westminster-Abbey or his own family-vault. A king must have a coronation—a nobleman a funeral-procession.—The man is nothing without the pageant. . The poet's cemetery is the human

mind, in which he sows the seeds of never-ending thought—his monument is to be found in his works :

“ Nothing can cover his high fame but heaven ;
No pyramids set off his memory,
But the eternal substance of his greatness.”

Lord Byron is dead : he also died a martyr to his zeal in the cause of freedom, for the last, best hopes of man. Let that be his excuse and his epitaph !

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

SIR WALTER SCOTT is undoubtedly the most popular writer of the age—the “lord of the ascendant” for the time being. He is just half what the human intellect is capable of being : if you take the universe, and divide it into two parts, he knows all that it *has been* ; all that it *is to be* is nothing to him. His is a mind brooding over antiquity—scorning “the present ignorant time.” He is “laudator temporis acti”—a “*prophesier* of things past.” The old

world is to him a crowded map ; the new one a dull, hateful blank. He dotes on all well-authenticated superstitions ; he shudders at the shadow of innovation. His retentiveness of memory, his accumulated weight of interested prejudice or romantic association have overlaid his other faculties. The cells of his memory are vast, various, full even to bursting with life and motion ; his speculative understanding is empty, flaccid, poor, and dead. His mind receives and treasures up every thing brought to it by tradition or custom—it does not project itself beyond this into the world unknown, but mechanically shrinks back as from the edge of a precipice. The land of pure reason is to his apprehension like *Van Diemen's Land* ;—barren, miserable, distant, a place of exile, the dreary abode of savages, convicts, and adventurers. Sir Walter would make a bad hand of a description of the *Millennium*, unless he could lay the scene in Scotland five hundred years ago, and then he would want facts and worm-eaten parchments to support his drooping style. Our historical novelist firmly thinks that nothing is but what

has been—that the moral world stands still, as the material one was supposed to do of old—and that we can never get beyond the point where we actually are without utter destruction, though every thing changes and will change from what it was three hundred years ago to what it is now,—from what it is now to all that the bigoted admirer of the good old times most dreads and hates!

It is long since we read, and long since we thought of our author's poetry. It would probably have gone out of date with the immediate occasion, even if he himself had not contrived to banish it from our recollection. It is not to be denied that it had great merit, both of an obvious and intrinsic kind. It abounded in vivid descriptions, in spirited action, in smooth and flowing versification. But it wanted *character*. It was poetry “of no mark or likelihood.” It slid out of the mind as soon as read, like a river; and would have been forgotten, but that the public curiosity was fed with ever-new supplies from the same teeming liquid source. It is not every man that can write six quarto volumes

in verse, that are caught up with avidity, even by fastidious judges. But what a difference between *their* popularity and that of the Scotch Novels! It is true, the public read and admired the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and so on, and each individual was contented to read and admire because the public did so : but with regard to the prose-works of the same (supposed) author, it is quite *another-guess* sort of thing. Here every one stands forward to applaud on his own ground, would be thought to go before the public opinion, is eager to extol his favourite characters louder, to understand them better than every body else, and has his own scale of comparative excellence for each work, supported by nothing but his own enthusiastic and fearless convictions. It must be amusing to the *Author of Waverley* to hear his readers and admirers (and are not these the same thing?*) quarrelling which of his

* No ! For we met with a young lady who kept a circulating library and a milliner's shop, in a watering-place in the country, who, when we inquired for the *Scotch Novels*, spoke indifferently about them; said they were " so dry she

novels is the best, opposing character to character, quoting passage against passage, striving to surpass each other in the extravagance of their encomiums, and yet unable to settle the precedence, or to do the author's writings justice—so various, so equal, so transcendant are their merits! His volumes of poetry were received as fashionable and well-dressed acquaintances: we are ready to tear the others in pieces as old friends. There was something meretricious in Sir Walter's ballad-rhymes; and like those who keep Opera *figurantes*, we were willing to have our admiration shared, and our taste confirmed by the town: but the Novels are like the betrothed of our hearts, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and we are jealous that any one should be as much delighted or as thoroughly acquainted with their beauties as ourselves. For which of his poetical heroines would the reader break a lance so soon as for Jeanie Deans? What

could hardly get through them," and recommended us to read *Agnes*. We never thought of it before; but we would venture to lay a wager that there are many other young ladies in the same situation, and who think 'Old Mortality' "dry."

Lady of the Lake can compare with the beautiful Rebecca? We believe the late Mr. John Scott went to his death-bed (though a painful and premature one) with some degree of satisfaction, inasmuch as he had penned the most elaborate panegyric on the *Scotch Novels* that had as yet appeared!—The *Epics* are not poems, so much as metrical romances. There is a glittering veil of verse thrown over the features of nature and of old romance. The deep incisions into character are “skinned and filmed over”—the details are lost or shaped into flimsy and insipid decorum; and the truth of feeling and of circumstance is translated into a tinkling sound, a tinsel *common-place*. It must be owned, there is a power in true poetry that lifts the mind from the ground of reality to a higher sphere, that penetrates the inert, scattered, incoherent materials presented to it, and by a force and inspiration of its own, melts and moulds them into sublimity and beauty. But Sir Walter (we contend, under correction) has not this creative impulse, this plastic power, this capacity of reacting on his first impressions. He

is a learned, a literal, a *matter-of-fact* expounder of truth or fable :* he does not soar above and look down upon his subject, imparting his own lofty views and feelings to his descriptions of nature—he relies upon it, is raised by it, is one with it, or he is nothing. A poet is essentially a *maker*; that is, he must atone for what he loses in individuality and local resemblance by the energies and resources of his own mind. The writer of whom we speak is deficient in these last. He has either not the faculty or not the will to impregnate his subject by an effort of pure invention. The execution also is much upon a par with the more ephemeral effusions of the press. It is light, agreeable, effeminate, diffuse. Sir Walter's Muse is a *Modern Antique*. The smooth, glossy texture of his verse contrasts happily with the quaint, uncouth, rugged materials of which it is composed; and takes away any appearance of heaviness or harshness from the body of local traditions and obsolete costume. We see grim knights and iron armour; but then they are

* Just as Cobbett is a *matter-of-fact* reasoner.

woven in silk with a careless, delicate hand, and have the softness of flowers. The poet's figures might be compared to old tapestries copied on the finest velvet :—they are not like Raphael's *Cartoons*, but they are very like Mr. Westall's drawings, which accompany, and are intended to illustrate them. This facility and grace of execution is the more remarkable, as a story goes that not long before the appearance of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* Sir Walter (then Mr.) Scott, having, in the company of a friend, to cross the Frith of Forth in a ferry-boat, they proposed to beguile the time by writing a number of verses on a given subject, and that at the end of an hour's hard study, they found they had produced only six lines between them. “It is plain,” said the unconscious author to his fellow-labourer, “that you and I need never think of getting our living by writing poetry!” In a year or so after this, he set to work, and poured out quarto upon quarto, as if they had been drops of water. As to the rest, and compared with true and great poets, our Scottish Minstrel is but “a metre ballad-monger.” We

would rather have written one song of Burns, or a single passage in Lord Byron's *Heaven and Earth*, or one of Wordsworth's "fancies and good-nights," than all his epics. What is he to Spenser, over whose immortal, ever-amiable verse beauty hovers and trembles, and who has shed the purple light of Fancy, from his ambrosial wings, over all nature? What is there of the might of Milton, whose head is canopied in the blue serene, and who takes us to sit with him there? What is there (in his ambling rhymes) of the deep pathos of Chaucer? Or of the o'er-informing power of Shakspeare, whose eye, watching alike the minutest traces of characters and the strongest movements of passion, "glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," and with the lambent flame of genius, playing round each object, lights up the universe in a robe of its own radiance? Sir Walter has no voluntary power of combination: all his associations (as we said before) are those of habit or of tradition. He is a mere narrative and descriptive poet, garrulous of the old time. The definition of his poetry is a pleasing superficiality.

Not so of his NOVELS AND ROMANCES. There we turn over a new leaf—another and the same—the same in matter, but in form, in power how different! The author of *Waverley* has got rid of the tagging of rhymes, the eking out of syllables, the supplying of epithets, the colours of style, the grouping of his characters, and the regular march of events, and comes to the point at once, and strikes at the heart of his subject, without dismay and without disguise. His poetry was a lady's waiting-maid, dressed out in cast-off finery : his prose is a beautiful, rustic nymph, that, like Dorothea in *Don Quixote*, when she is surprised with dishevelled tresses bathing her naked feet in the brook, looks round her abashed at the admiration her charms have excited! The grand secret of the author's success in these latter productions is that he has completely got rid of the trammels of authorship, and torn off at one rent (as Lord Peter got rid of so many yards of lace in the *Tale of a Tub*) all the ornaments of fine writing and worn-out sentimentality. All is fresh, as from the hand of nature ; by going a century or two

back and laying the scene in a remote and uncultivated district, all becomes new and startling in the present advanced period.—Highland manners, characters, scenery, superstitions, Northern dialect and costume, the wars, the religion, and politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, give a charming and wholesome relief to the fastidious refinement and “over laboured lassitude” of modern readers, like the effect of plunging a nervous valetudinarian into a cold-bath. The *Scotch Novels*, for this reason, are not so much admired in Scotland as in England. The contrast, the transition is less striking. From the top of the Calton-Hill, the inhabitants of “Auld Reekie” can descry, or fancy they descry, the peaks of Ben Lomond and the waving outline of Rob Roy’s country : we who live at the southern extremity of the island can only catch a glimpse of the billowy scene in the descriptions of the Author of *Waverley*. The mountain air is most bracing to our languid nerves, and it is brought us in ship-loads from the neighbourhood of Abbot’s-Ford. There is another circumstance to be taken into the

account. In Edinburgh there is a little opposition and something of the spirit of cabal between the partisans of works proceeding from Mr. Constable's and Mr. Blackwood's shops. Mr. Constable gives the highest prices; but being the Whig bookseller it is grudged that he should do so. An attempt is therefore made to transfer a certain share of popularity to the second-rate Scotch novels, "the embryo fry, the little eyry of *rickety* children," issuing through Mr. Blackwood's shop-door. This operates a diversion, which does not affect us here. The Author of *Waverley* wears the palm of legendary lore alone. Sir Walter may, indeed, surfeit us: his imitators make us sick! It may be asked, it has been asked, "Have we no materials for romance in England? Must we look to Scotland for a supply of whatever is original and striking in this kind?" And we answer—"Yes!" Every foot of soil is with us worked up: nearly every movement of the social machine is calculable. We have no room left for violent catastrophes; for grotesque quaintnesses: for wizard spells. The last skirts of ignorance and barbarism

are seen hovering (in Sir Walter's pages) over the Border. We have, it is true, gipsies in this country as well as at the Cairn of Dorncleugh: but they live under clipped hedges, and repose in camp-beds, and do not perch on crags, like eagles, or take shelter, like sea-mews, in basaltic subterranean caverns. We have heaths with rude heaps of stones upon them: but no existing superstition converts them into the Geese of Mickelstane-Moor, or sees a Black Dwarf groping among them. We have sects in religion: but the only thing sublime or ridiculous in that way is Mr. Irving, the Caledonian preacher, who "comes like a satyr staring from the woods, and yet speaks like an orator!" We had a Parson Adams not quite a hundred years ago—a Sir Roger de Coverley rather more than a hundred! Even Sir Walter is ordinarily obliged to pitch his angle (strong as the hook is) a hundred miles to the North of the "Modern Athens" or a century back. His last work,* indeed, is mystical, is romantic in nothing but the title-page.

* St. Ronan's Well.

Instead of "a holy-water sprinkle dipped in dew," he has given us a fashionable watering-place—and we see what he has made of it. He must not come down from his fastnesses in traditional barbarism and native rusticity: the level, the littleness, the frippery of modern civilization will undo him as it has undone us!

Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life; and that if we can but arrive at what men feel, do, and say in striking and singular situations, the result will be "more lively, audible, and full of vent," than the fine-spun cobwebs of the brain. With reverence be it spoken, he is like the man who having to imitate the squeaking of a pig upon the stage, brought the animal under his coat with him. Our author has conjured up the actual people he has to deal with, or as much as he could get of them, in "their habits as they lived." He has ransacked old chronicles, and poured the contents upon his page; he has squeezed

out musty records; he has consulted way-faring pilgrims, bed-rid sibyls; he has invoked the spirits of the air; he has conversed with the living and the dead, and let them tell their story their own way; and by borrowing of others, has enriched his own genius with everlasting variety, truth, and freedom. He has taken his materials from the original, authentic sources, in large concrete masses, and not tampered with or too much frittered them away. He is the only amanuensis of truth and history. It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is. All that portion of the history of his country that he has touched upon (wide as the scope is), the manners, the personages, the events, the scenery, lives over again in his volumes. Nothing is wanting—the illusion is complete. There is a hurtling in the air, a trampling of feet upon the ground, as these perfect representations of human character or fanciful belief come thronging back upon our imaginations. We will merely recall a few of the subjects of his pencil to the reader's recol-

lection; for nothing we could add, by way of note or commendation, could make the impression more vivid.

There is (first and foremost, because the earliest of our acquaintance) the Baron of Bradwardine, stately, kind-hearted, whimsical, pedantic; and Flora Mac Ivor (whom even *we* forgive for her Jacobitism), the fierce Vich Ian Vohr, and Evan Dhu, constant in death, and Davie Gellatly roasting his eggs or turning his rhymes with restless volubility, and the two stag-hounds that met Waverley, as fine as ever Titian painted, or Paul Veronese:—then there is old Balfour of Burley, brandishing his sword and his Bible with fire-eyed fury, trying a fall with the insolent, gigantic Bothwell at the 'Change-house, and vanquishing him at the noble battle of Loudonhill; there is Bothwell himself, drawn to the life, proud, cruel, selfish, profligate, but with the love-letters of the gentle Alice (written thirty years before), and his verses to her memory, found in his pocket after his death: in the same volume of *Old Mortality* is that lone figure, like a figure in Scripture, of the woman

sitting on the stone at the turning to the mountain, to warn Burley that there is a lion in his path; and the fawning Claverhouse, beautiful as a panther, smooth-looking, blood-spotted; and the fanatics, Macbriar and Mucklewrath, crazed with zeal and sufferings; and the inflexible Morton, and the faithful Edith, who refused to "give her hand to another while her heart was with her lover in the deep and dead sea." And in *The Heart of Mid Lothian* we have Effie Deans (that sweet, faded flower) and Jeanie, her more than sister, and old David Deans, the patriarch of St. Leonard's Crag, and Butler, and Dumbiedikes, eloquent in his silence, and Mr. Bartoline Saddle-tree and his prudent helpmate, and Porteous swinging in the wind, and Madge Wildfire, full of finery and madness, and her ghastly mother.— Again, there is Meg Merrilies, standing on her rock, stretched on her bier with "her head to the east," and Dirk Hatterick (equal to Shakespeare's Master Barnardine), and Glossin, the soul of an attorney, and Dandy Dinmont, with his terrier-pack and his pony Dumple, and the fiery Colonel Mannering, and the modish old

counsellor Pleydell, and Dominic Sampson,* and Rob Roy (like the eagle in his eyry), and Baillie Nicol Jarvie, and the inimitable Major Galbraith, and Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and Die Vernon, the best of secret-keepers; and in the *Antiquary*, the ingenious and abstruse Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck, and the old beadsman Edie Ochiltree, and that preternatural figure of old Edith Elspeith, a living shadow, in whom the lamp of life had been long extinguished, had it not been fed by remorse and “thick-coming” recollections; and that striking picture of the effects of feudal tyranny and fiendish pride, the unhappy Earl of Glenallan; and the Black Dwarf, and his friend Habbie of the Heughfoot (the cheerful hunter), and his cousin Grace Armstrong, fresh and laughing like the morning; and the *Children of the Mist*, and the baying of the blood-hound that tracks their steps at a distance (the hollow echoes are in our ears now), and Amy and her hapless love, and the villain Varney, and the

* Perhaps the finest scene in all these novels, is that where the Dominic meets his pupil, Miss Lucy, the morning after her brother's arrival.

deep voice of George of Douglas—and the immoveable Balafre, and Master Oliver the Barber in Quentin Durward—and the quaint humour of the Fortunes of Nigel, and the comic spirit of Peveril of the Peak—and the fine old English romance of Ivanhoe. What a list of names! What a host of associations! What a thing is human life! What a power is that of genius! What a world of thought and feeling is thus rescued from oblivion! How many hours of heartfelt satisfaction has our author given to the gay and thoughtless! How many sad hearts has he soothed in pain and solitude! It is no wonder that the public repay with lengthened applause and gratitude the pleasure they receive. He writes as fast as they can read, and he does not write himself down. He is always in the public eye, and we do not tire of him. His worst is better than any other person's best. His *back-grounds* (and his later works are little else but back-grounds capitally made out) are more attractive than the principal figures and most complicated actions of other writers. His works (taken together) are almost like a new

edition of human nature. This is indeed to be an author!

The political bearing of the *Scotch Novels* has been a considerable recommendation to them. They are a relief to the mind, rarefied as it has been with modern philosophy, and heated with ultra-radicalism. At a time also, when we bid fair to revive the principles of the Stuarts, it is interesting to bring us acquainted with their persons and misfortunes. The candour of Sir Walter's historic pen levels our bristling prejudices on this score, and sees fair play between Roundheads and Cavaliers, between Protestant and Papist. He is a writer reconciling all the diversities of human nature to the reader. He does not enter into the distinctions of hostile sects or parties, but treats of the strength or the infirmity of the human mind, of the virtues or vices of the human breast, as they are to be found blended in the whole race of mankind. Nothing can show more handsomely or be more gallantly executed. There was a talk at one time that our author was about to take Guy Faux for the subject of one of his novels, in order to put a

more liberal and humane construction on the Gunpowder Plot than our "No Popery" prejudices have hitherto permitted. Sir Walter is a professed *clarifier* of the age from the vulgar and still lurking old-English antipathy to Popery and Slavery. Through some odd process of *servile* logic, it should seem, that in restoring the claims of the Stuarts by the courtesy of romance, the House of Brunswick are more firmly seated in point of fact, and the Bourbons, by collateral reasoning, become legitimate! In any other point of view, we cannot possibly conceive how Sir Walter imagines "he has done something to revive the declining spirit of loyalty" by these novels. His loyalty is founded on *would-be* treason: he props the actual throne by the shadow of rebellion. Does he really think of making us enamoured of the "good old times" by the faithful and harrowing portraits he has drawn of them? Would he carry us back to the early stages of barbarism, of clanship, of the feudal system as "a consummation devoutly to be wished?" Is he infatuated enough, or does he so dote and drivel over his own slothful and

self-willed prejudices, as to believe that he will make a single convert to the beauty of Legitimacy, that is, of lawless power and savage bigotry, when he himself is obliged to apologise for the horrors he describes, and even render his descriptions credible to the modern reader by referring to the authentic history of these delectable times? He is

* “And here we cannot but think it necessary to offer some better proof than the incidents of an idle tale, to vindicate the melancholy representation of manners which has been just laid before the reader. It is grievous to think that those valiant Barons, to whose stand against the crown the liberties of England were indebted for their existence, should themselves have been such dreadful oppressors, and capable of excesses, contrary not only to the laws of England, but to those of nature and humanity. But alas! we have only to extract from the industrious Henry one of those numerous passages which he has collected from contemporary historians, to prove that fiction itself can hardly reach the dark reality of the horrors of the period.

“The description given by the author of the Saxon Chronicle of the cruelties exercised in the reign of King Stephen by the great barons and lords of castles, who were all Normans, affords a strong proof of the excesses of which they were capable when their passions were inflamed. ‘They grievously oppressed the poor people by building castles; and when they were built, they filled them with wicked men or rather devils, who seized both men and women who they ima-

indeed so besotted as to the moral of his own story, that he has even the blindness to go out of his way to have a fling at *flints* and *dungs* (the contemptible ingredients, as he would have us believe, of a modern rabble) at the very time when he is describing a mob of the twelfth century—a mob (one should think) after the writer's own heart, without one particle of modern philosophy or revolutionary politics in their composition, who were to a man, to a hair, just what priests, and kings, and nobles *let* them be, and who were collected to witness (a spectacle proper to the times) the burning of the lovely Rebecca at a stake for a sorceress, because she was a Jewess, beautiful and innocent, and the consequent victim of insane bigotry and un-

gined had any money, threw them into prison, and put them to more cruel tortures than the martyrs ever endured. They suffocated some in mud, and suspended others by the feet, or the head, or the thumbs, kindling fires below them. They squeezed the heads of some with knotted cords till they pierced their brains, while they threw others into dungeons swarming with serpents, snakes, and toads.' But it would be cruel to put the reader to the pain of perusing the remainder of the description."—*Henry's Hist.* edit. 1805, vol. vii. p. 346.

bridled profligacy. And it is at this moment (when the heart is kindled and bursting with indignation at the revolting abuses of self-constituted power) that Sir Walter *stops the press* to have a sneer at the people, and to put a spoke (as he thinks) in the wheel of upstart innovation! This is what he “calls backing his friends”—it is thus he administers charms and philtres to our love of Legitimacy, makes us conceive a horror of all reform, civil, political, or religious, and would fain put down the *Spirit of the Age*. The author of *Waverley* might just as well get up and make a speech at a dinner at Edinburgh, abusing Mr. Mac-Adam for his improvements in the roads, on the ground that they were nearly *impassable* in many places “sixty years since;” or object to Mr. Peel’s *Police-Bill*, by insisting that Hounslow-Heath was formerly a scene of greater interest and terror to highwaymen and travellers, and cut a greater figure in the *Newgate-Calendar* than it does at present.—Oh! Wickliff, Luther, Hampden, Sidney, Somers, mistaken Whigs, and thoughtless Reformers in religion and politics, and all ye,

whether poets or philosophers, heroes or sages, inventors of arts or sciences, patriots, benefactors of the human race, enlighteners and civilisers of the world, who have (so far) reduced opinion to reason, and power to law, who are the cause that we no longer burn witches and heretics at slow fires, that the thumb-screws are no longer applied by ghastly, smiling judges, to extort confession of imputed crimes from sufferers for conscience sake; that men are no longer strung up like acorns on trees without judge or jury, or hunted like wild beasts through thickets and glens, who have abated the cruelty of priests, the pride of nobles, the divinity of kings in former times; to whom we owe it, that we no longer wear round our necks the collar of Gurth the swineherd, and of Wamba the jester; that the castles of great lords are no longer the dens of banditti, from whence they issue with fire and sword, to lay waste the land; that we no longer expire in loathsome dungeons without knowing the cause, or have our right hands struck off for raising them in self-defence against wanton insult; that we can sleep

without fear of being burnt in our beds, or travel without making our wills; that no Amy Robsarts are thrown down trap-doors by Richard Varneys with impunity; that no Red Reiver of Westburn-Flat sets fire to peaceful cottages; that no Claverhouse signs cold-blooded death-warrants in sport; that we have no Tristan the Hermit, or Petit-Andrè, crawling near us, like spiders, and making our flesh creep, and our hearts sicken within us at every moment of our lives—ye who have produced this change in the face of nature and society, return to earth once more, and beg pardon of Sir Walter and his patrons, who sigh at not being able to undo all that you have done! Leaving this question, there are two other remarks which we wished to make on the Novels. The one was, to express our admiration at the good-nature of the mottos, in which the author has taken occasion to remember and quote almost every living author (whether illustrious or obscure) but himself—an indirect argument in favour of the general opinion as to the source from which they spring—and the other was, to hint our astor-

nishment at the innumerable and incessant instances of bad and slovenly English in them, more, we believe, than in any other works now printed. We should think the writer could not possibly read the manuscript after he has once written it, or overlook the press.

If there were a writer, who, “born for the universe”—

“ ———— Narrow’d his mind,
And to party gave up what was meant for mankind—”

who, from the height of his genius looking abroad into nature, and scanning the recesses of the human heart, “winked and shut his apprehension up” to every thought or purpose that tended to the future good of mankind—who, raised by affluence, the reward of successful industry, and by the voice of fame above the want of any but the most honourable patronage, stooped to the unworthy arts of adulation, and abetted the views of the great with the pettifogging feelings of the meanest dependant on office—who, having se-

cured the admiration of the public (with the probable reversion of immortality), showed no respect for himself, for that genius that had raised him to distinction, for that nature which he trampled under foot—who, amiable, frank, friendly, manly in private life, was seized with the dotage of age and the fury of a woman, the instant politics were concerned—who reserved all his candour and comprehensiveness of view for history, and vented his littleness, pique, resentment, bigotry, and intolerance on his contemporaries—who took the wrong side, and defended it by unfair means—who, the moment his own interest or the prejudices of others interfered, seemed to forget all that was due to the pride of intellect, to the sense of manhood—who, praised, admired by men of all parties alike, repaid the public liberality by striking a secret and envenomed blow at the reputation of every one who was not the ready tool of power—who strewed the slime of rankling malice and mercenary scorn over the bud and promise of genius, because it was not fostered in the hot-bed of corruption, or

warped by the trammels of servility—who supported the worst abuses of authority in the worst spirit—who joined a gang of desperadoes to spread calumny, contempt, infamy, wherever they were merited by honesty or talent on a different side—who officiously undertook to decide public questions by private insinuations, to prop the throne by nicknames, and the altar by lies—who being (by common consent) the finest, the most humane and accomplished writer of his age, associated himself with and encouraged the lowest panders of a venal press; deluging, nauseating the public mind with the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse and vulgar *slang*; showing no remorse, no relenting or compassion towards the victims of this nefarious and organized system of party-proscription, carried on under the mask of literary criticism and fair discussion, insulting the misfortunes of some, and trampling on the early grave of others—

“ Who would not grieve if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?”

But we believe there is no other age or country of the world (but ours), in which such genius could have been so degraded !

MR. COLERIDGE.

THE present is an age of talkers, and not of doers; and the reason is, that the world is growing old. We are so far advanced in the Arts and Sciences, that we live in retrospect, and dote on past achievements. The accumulation of knowledge has been so great, that we are lost in wonder at the height it has reached, instead of attempting to climb or add to it; while the variety of objects distracts and dazzles the looker-on. What *niche* remains un-

occupied? What path untried? What is the use of doing any thing, unless we could do better than all those who have gone before us? What hope is there of this? We are like those who have been to see some noble monument of art, who are content to admire without thinking of rivalling it; or like guests after a feast, who praise the hospitality of the donor "and thank the bounteous Pan"—perhaps carrying away some trifling fragments; or like the spectators of a mighty battle, who still hear its sound afar off, and the clashing of armour and the neighing of the war-horse and the shout of victory is in their ears, like the rushing of innumerable waters!

Mr. Coleridge has "a mind reflecting ages past:" his voice is like the echo of the congregated roar of the "dark rearward and abyss" of thought. He who has seen a mouldering tower by the side of a crystal lake, hid by the mist, but glittering in the wave below, may conceive the dim, gleaming, uncertain intelligence of his eye: he who has marked the evening clouds uprolled (a world of vapours), has seen the picture of his mind, unearthly, unsub-

stantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms—

“ That which was now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.”

Our author's mind is (as he himself might express it) *tangential*. There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested. With an understanding fertile, subtle, expansive, “quick, forgetive, apprehensive,” beyond all living precedent, few traces of it will perhaps remain. He lends himself to all impressions alike; he gives up his mind and liberty of thought to none. He is a general lover of art and science, and wedded to no one in particular. He pursues knowledge as a mistress, with outstretched hands and winged speed; but as he is about to embrace her, his Daphne turns—alas! not to a laurel! Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Mr. Coleridge's memory, like a rich, but somewhat tattered piece of tapestry. We might add (with more seeming

than real extravagance), that scarce a thought can pass through the mind of man, but its sound has at some time or other passed over his head with rustling pinions. On whatever question or author you speak, he is prepared to take up the theme with advantage—from Peter Abelard down to Thomas Moore, from the subtlest metaphysics to the politics of the *Courier*. There is no man of genius, in whose praise he descants, but the critic seems to stand above the author, and “what in him is weak, to strengthen, what is low, to raise and support :” nor is there any work of genius that does not come out of his hands like an Illuminated Missal, sparkling even in its defects. If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer ; but he lays down his pen to make sure of an auditor, and mortgages the admiration of posterity for the stare of an idler. If he had not been a poet, he would have been a powerful logician ; if he had not dipped his wing in the Unitarian controversy, he might have soared to the very summit of fancy. But in writing verse, he is trying to

subject the Muse to *transcendental* theories: in his abstract reasoning, he misses his way by strewing it with flowers. All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice. Mr. Coleridge is too rich in intellectual wealth, to need task himself to any drudgery: he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination, and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy, or losing themselves in endless obscurity—

“ And by the force of blear illusion,
They draw him on to his confusion.”

What is the little he could add to the stock, compared with the countless stores that lie about him, that he should stoop to pick up a name, or to polish an idle fancy? He walks abroad in the majesty of an universal understanding, eyeing the “rich strong,” or golden sky above him, and “goes sounding on his way,” in eloquent accents, uncompelled and free!

Persons of the greatest capacity are often

those, who for this reason do the least ; for surveying themselves from the highest point of view, amidst the infinite variety of the universe, their own share in it seems trifling, and scarce worth a thought, and they prefer the contemplation of all that is, or has been, or can be, to the making a coil about doing what, when done, is no better than vanity. It is hard to concentrate all our attention and efforts on one pursuit, except from ignorance of others ; and without this concentration of our faculties, no great progress can be made in any one thing. It is not merely that the mind is not capable of the effort ; it does not think the effort worth making. Action is one ; but thought is manifold. He whose restless eye glances through the wide compass of nature and art, will not consent to have "his own nothings monstered : " but he must do this, before he can give his whole soul to them. The mind, after "letting contemplation have its fill," or

" Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air,"

sinks down on the ground, breathless, ex-

hausted, powerless, inactive; or if it must have some vent to its feelings, seeks the most easy and obvious; is soothed by friendly flattery, lulled by the murmur of immediate applause, thinks as it were aloud, and babbles in its dreams! A scholar (so to speak) is a more disinterested and abstracted character than a mere author. The first looks at the numberless volumes of a library, and says, "All these are mine:" the other points to a single volume (perhaps it may be an immortal one) and says, "My name is written on the back of it." This is a puny and groveling ambition, beneath the lofty amplitude of Mr. Coleridge's mind. No, he revolves in his wayward soul, or utters to the passing wind, or discourses to his own shadow, things mightier and more various!—Let us draw the curtain, and unlock the shrine.

Learning rocked him in his cradle, and,
while yet a child,

"He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came."

At sixteen he wrote his *Ode on Chatterton*,
and he still reverts to that period with delight,

not so much as it relates to himself (for that string of his own early promise of fame rather jars than otherwise) but as exemplifying the youth of a poet. Mr. Coleridge talks of himself, without being an egotist, for in him the individual is always merged in the abstract and general. He distinguished himself at school and at the University by his knowledge of the classics, and gained several prizes for Greek epigrams. How many men are there (great scholars, celebrated names in literature) who having done the same thing in their youth, have no other idea all the rest of their lives but of this achievement, of a fellowship and dinner, and who, installed in academic honours, would look down on our author as a mere strolling bard! At Christ's Hospital, where he was brought up, he was the idol of those among his school-fellows, who mingled with their bookish studies the music of thought and of humanity; and he was usually attended round the cloisters by a group of these (inspiring and inspired) whose hearts, even then, burnt within them as he talked, and where the sounds yet linger to mock ELIA

on his way, still turning pensive to the past! One of the finest and rarest parts of Mr. Coleridge's conversation, is when he expatiates on the Greek tragedians (not that he is not well acquainted, when he pleases, with the epic poets, or the philosophers, or orators, or historians of antiquity)—on the subtle reasonings and melting pathos of Euripides, on the harmonious gracefulness of Sophocles, tuning his love-laboured song, like sweetest warblings from a sacred grove; on the high-wrought trumpet-tongued eloquence of Æschylus, whose Prometheus, above all, is like an Ode to Fate, and a pleading with Providence, his thoughts being let loose as his body is chained on his solitary rock, and his afflicted will (the emblem of mortality)

“ Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

As the impassioned critic speaks and rises in his theme, you would think you heard the voice of the Man hated by the Gods, contending with the wild winds as they roar, and his eye glitters with the spirit of Antiquity!

Next he was engaged with Hartley's tribes

of mind, “etherial braid, thought-woven,”—and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles and the great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come—and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestley’s Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician’s spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley’s fairy-world,* and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words—and he was deep-read in Malebranche, and in Cudworth’s Intellectual System (a huge pile of

* Mr. Coleridge named his eldest son (the writer of some beautiful sonnets) after Hartley, and the second after Berkeley. The third was called Derwent, after the river of that name. Nothing can be more characteristic of his mind than this circumstance. All his ideas indeed are like a river, flowing on for ever, and still murmuring as it flows, discharging its waters and still replenished—

“And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean!”

learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook's hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler's Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle's fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age—and Leibnitz's *Pre-established Harmony* reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man—and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the *hortus siccus* of Dissent, where he pared religion down to the standard of reason and stripped faith of mystery, and preached Christ crucified and the Unity of the Godhead, and so dwelt for a while in the spirit with John Huss and Jerome of Prague and Socinus and old John Zisca, and ran through Neal's History of the Puritans, and Calamy's Non-Conformists' Memorial, having like thoughts and passions with them—but then Spinoza became his God, and he took up the vast chain of being in his hand, and the round world became the centre and the soul of all things in some shadowy sense, forlorn of meaning, and

around him he beheld the living traces and the sky-pointing proportions of the mighty Pan—but poetry redeemed him from this spectral philosophy, and he bathed his heart in beauty, and gazed at the golden light of heaven, and drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy-stream or fountain,

“ ———— When he saw nought but beauty,
When he heard the voice of that Almighty One
In every breeze that blew, or wave that murmured”—

and wedded with truth in Plato's shade, and in the writings of Proclus and Plotinus saw the ideas of things in the eternal mind, and unfolded all mysteries with the Schoolmen and fathomed the depths of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, and entered the third heaven with Jacob Behmen, and walked hand in hand with Swedenborg through the pavilions of the New Jerusalem, and sung his faith in the promise and in the word in his *Religious Musings*—and lowering himself from that dizzy height, poised himself on Milton's wings, and spread out his thoughts in charity

with the glad prose of Jeremy Taylor, and wept over Bowles's Sonnets, and studied Cowper's blank verse, and betook himself to Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, and sported with the wits of Charles the Second's days and of Queen Anne, and relished Swift's style and that of the *John Bull* (Arbuthnot's we mean, not Mr. Croker's), and dallied with the British Essayists and Novelists, and knew all qualities of more modern writers with a learned spirit, Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Junius, and Burke, and Godwin, and the Sorrows of Werter, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, and Marivaux, and Crebillon, and thousands more—now “laughed with Rabelais in his easy chair” or pointed to Hogarth, or afterwards dwelt on Claude's classic scenes or spoke with rapture of Raphael, and compared the women at Rome to figures that had walked out of his pictures, or visited the Oratory of Pisa, and described the works of Giotto and Ghirlandaio and Massaccio, and gave the moral of the picture of the Triumph of Death, where the beggars and the wretched invoke his dreadful dart, but the rich and mighty

of the earth quail and shrink before it; and in that land of siren sights and sounds, saw a dance of peasant girls, and was charmed with lutes and gondolas,—or wandered into Germany and lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forests and of the Kantian philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of Fichtè and Schelling and Lessing, and God knows who—this was long after, but all the former while, he had nerved his heart and filled his eyes with tears, as he hailed the rising orb of liberty, since quenched in darkness and in blood, and had kindled his affections at the blaze of the French Revolution, and sang for joy when the towers of the Bastile and the proud places of the insolent and the oppressor fell, and would have floated his bark, freighted with fondest fancies, across the Atlantic wave with Southey and others to seek for peace and freedom—

“ In Philharmonia’s undivided dale !”

Alas! “Frailty, thy name is *Genius!*”—What is become of all this mighty heap of hope, of thought, of learning, and humanity? It has

ended in swallowing doses of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the *Courier*.—Such, and so little is the mind of man!

It was not to be supposed that Mr. Coleridge could keep on at the rate he set off; he could not realize all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition; other stimulants supplied the place, and kept up the intoxicating dream, the fever and the madness of his early impressions. Liberty (the philosopher's and the poet's bride) had fallen a victim, meanwhile, to the murderous practices of the hag, Legitimacy. Proscribed by court-hirelings, too romantic for the herd of vulgar politicians, our enthusiast stood at bay, and at last turned on the pivot of a subtle casuistry to the *unclean side*: but his discursive reason would not let him trammel himself into a poet-laureate or stamp-distributor, and he stopped, ere he had quite passed that well-known "bourne from whence no traveller returns"—and so has sunk into torpid, uneasy repose, tantalized by useless resources, haunted by vain imaginings, his lips idly moving, but his heart for ever still, or, as the shat-

tered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholy music to the ear of memory! Such is the fate of genius in an age, when in the unequal contest with sovereign wrong, every man is ground to powder who is not either a born slave, or who does not willingly and at once offer up the yearnings of humanity and the dictates of reason as a welcome sacrifice to besotted prejudice and loathsome power.

Of all Mr. Coleridge's productions, the *Ancient Mariner* is the only one that we could with confidence put into any person's hands, on whom we wished to impress a favourable idea of his extraordinary powers. Let whatever other objections be made to it, it is unquestionably a work of genius—of wild, irregular, overwhelming imagination, and has that rich, varied movement in the verse, which gives a distant idea of the lofty or changeful tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice. In the *Christabel*, there is one splendid passage on divided friendship. The *Translation of Schiller's Wallenstein* is also a masterly production in its kind, faithful and spirited. Among his smaller pieces there are occasional bursts of

pathos and fancy, equal to what we might expect from him; but these form the exception, and not the rule. Such, for instance, is his affecting Sonnet to the author of the *Robbers*.

“ Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after-moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy.”

His Tragedy, entitled *Remorse*, is full of beautiful and striking passages, but it does not place the author in the first rank of dramatic writers. But if Mr. Coleridge's works do not place him in that rank, they injure instead of conveying a just idea of the man, for he himself is certainly in the first class of general intellect.

If our author's poetry is inferior to his conversation, his prose is utterly abortive. Hardly a gleam is to be found in it of the brilliancy and richness of those stores of thought and language that he pours out incessantly, when they are lost like drops of water in the ground. The principal work, in which he has attempted to embody his general views of things, is the *FRIEND*, of which, though it contains some noble passages and fine trains of thought, prolixity and obscurity are the most frequent characteristics.

No two persons can be conceived more opposite in character or genius than the subject of the present sketch and Mr. Godwin. The latter with less natural capacity, and with fewer acquired advantages, by concentrating his mind on some given object, and doing what he had to do with all his might, has accomplished much, and will leave more than one monument of a powerful intellect behind him; Mr. Coleridge, by dissipating his, and dallying with every subject by turns, has done little or nothing to justify to the world or to posterity, the high opinion which

all who have ever heard him converse, or known him intimately, with one accord entertain of him. Mr. Godwin's faculties have kept house, and plied their task in the workshop of the brain, diligently and effectually: Mr. Coleridge's have gossiped away their time, and gadded about from house to house, as if life's business were to melt the hours in listless talk. Mr. Godwin is intent on a subject, only as it concerns himself and his reputation; he works it out as a matter of duty, and discards from his mind whatever does not forward his main object as impertinent and vain. Mr. Coleridge, on the other hand, delights in nothing but episodes and digressions, neglects whatever he undertakes to perform, and can act only on spontaneous impulses, without object or method. "He cannot be constrained by mastery." While he should be occupied with a given pursuit, he is thinking of a thousand other things; a thousand tastes, a thousand objects tempt him, and distract his mind, which keeps open house, and entertains all comers; and after being fatigued and amused with morning calls from

idle visitors, finds the day consumed and its business unconcluded. Mr. Godwin, on the contrary, is somewhat exclusive and unsocial in his habits of mind, entertains no company but what he gives his whole time and attention to, and wisely writes over the doors of his understanding, his fancy, and his senses—"No admittance except on business." He has none of that fastidious refinement and false delicacy, which might lead him to balance between the endless variety of modern attainments. He does not throw away his life (nor a single half-hour of it) in adjusting the claims of different accomplishments, and in choosing between them or making himself master of them all. He sets about his task (whatever it may be), and goes through it with spirit and fortitude. He has the happiness to think an author the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest author in it. Mr. Coleridge, in writing an harmonious stanza, would stop to consider whether there was not more grace and beauty in a *Pas de trois*, and would not proceed till he had resolved this question by a chain of metaphysical reasoning without

end. Not so Mr. Godwin. That is best to him, which he can do best. He does not waste himself in vain aspirations and effeminate sympathies. He is blind, deaf, insensible to all but the trump of Fame. Plays, operas, painting, music, ball-rooms, wealth, fashion, titles, lords, ladies, touch him not—all these are no more to him than to the magician in his cell, and he writes on to the end of the chapter, through good report and evil report. *Pingo in eternitatem*—is his motto. He neither envies nor admires what others are, but is contented to be what he is, and strives to do the utmost he can. Mr. Coleridge has flirted with the Muses as with a set of mistresses: Mr. Godwin has been married twice, to Reason and to Fancy, and has to boast no short-lived progeny by each. So to speak, he has *valves* belonging to his mind, to regulate the quantity of gas admitted into it, so that like the bare, unsightly, but well-compacted steam-vessel, it cuts its liquid way, and arrives at its promised end: while Mr. Coleridge's bark, “taught with the little nautilus

to sail," the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave,

" Youth at its prow, and Pleasure at its helm,"

flutters its gaudy pennons in the air, glitters in the sun, but we wait in vain to hear of its arrival in the destined harbour. Mr. Godwin, with less variety and vividness, with less subtlety and susceptibility both of thought and feeling, has had firmer nerves, a more determined purpose, a more comprehensive grasp of his subject, and the results are as we find them. Each has met with his reward : for justice has, after all, been done to the pretensions of each ; and we must, in all cases, use means to ends !

It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century. Genius stopped the way of Legitimacy ; and therefore it was to be abated, crushed, or set aside as a nuisance. The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age. The flame of liberty, the light of intellect was to be extinguished with the sword—or with slander, whose edge is sharper

than the sword. The war between power and reason was carried on by the first of these abroad,—by the last, at home. No quarter was given (then or now) by the Government-critics, the authorised censors of the press, to those who followed the dictates of independence, who listened to the voice of the tempter, Fancy. Instead of gathering fruits and flowers, immortal fruits and amaranthine flowers, they soon found themselves beset not only by a host of prejudices, but assailed by all the engines of power, by nicknames, by lies, by all the arts of malice, interest, and hypocrisy, without a possibility of their defending themselves from the “ pelting of the pitiless storm,” that poured down upon them from the strong-holds of corruption and authority. The philosophers, the dry abstract reasoners, submitted to this reverse pretty well, and armed themselves with patience “ as with triple steel ” to bear discomfiture, persecution, and disgrace. But the poets, the creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They

did not like to be shut out when places and pensions, when the critic's praises and the laurel-wreath were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being *sent to Coventry*, and Mr. Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry and a musical voice — “His words were hollow, but they pleased the ear” of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-struck from the dry desert of unpopularity, like Hassan the camel-driver, and

“Curs'd the hour, and curs'd the luckless day,
When first from Schiraz' walls they bent their way.”

They are safely enclosed there, but Mr. Coleridge did not enter with them; pitching his tent upon the barren-waste without, and having no abiding city nor place of refuge.

MR. SOUTHEY.

MR. SOUTHEY, as we formerly remember to have seen him, had a hectic flush upon his cheek, a roving fire in his eye, a falcon glance, a look at once aspiring and dejected—it was the look that had been impressed upon his face by the events that marked the outset of his life, it was the dawn of Liberty that still tinged his cheek, a smile betwixt hope and sadness that still played upon his quivering lip. Mr. Southey's mind is essen-

tially sanguine, even to over-weeningness. It is prophetic of good ; it cordially embraces it ; it casts a longing, lingering look after it, even when it is gone for ever. He cannot bear to give up the thought of happiness, his confidence in his fellow-man, when all else despair. It is the very element, “ where he must live or have no life at all.” While he supposed it possible that a better form of society could be introduced than any that had hitherto existed, while the light of the French Revolution beamed into his soul, (and long after, it was seen reflected on his brow, like the light of setting suns on the peak of some high mountain, or lonely range of clouds, floating in purer ether!) while he had this hope, this faith in man left, he cherished it with child-like simplicity, he clung to it with the fondness of a lover, he was an enthusiast, a fanatic, a leveller ; he stuck at nothing that he thought would banish all pain and misery from the world—in his impatience of the smallest error or injustice, he would have sacrificed himself and the existing generation (a holocaust) to his devotion to the right cause.

But when he once believed, after many staggering doubts and painful struggles, that this was no longer possible, when his chimeras and golden dreams of human perfectibility vanished from him, he turned suddenly round, and maintained that “whatever is, is right.” Mr. Southey has not fortitude of mind, has not patience to think that evil is inseparable from the nature of things. His irritable sense rejects the alternative altogether, as a weak stomach rejects the food that is distasteful to it. He hopes on against hope, he believes in all unbelief. He must either repose on actual or on imaginary good. He missed his way in *Utopia*, he has found it at Old Sarum—

“His generous *ardour* no cold medium knows:”

his eagerness admits of no doubt or delay. He is ever in extremes, and ever in the wrong!

The reason is, that not truth, but self-opinion is the ruling principle of Mr. Southey's mind. The charm of novelty, the applause of the multitude, the sanction of power, the venerableness of antiquity, pique, resentment, the spirit of contradiction have a good deal

to do with his preferences. His inquiries are partial and hasty : his conclusions raw and unconcocted, and with a considerable infusion of whim and humour and a monkish spleen. His opinions are like certain wines, warm and generous when new ; but they will not keep, and soon turn flat or sour, for want of a stronger spirit of the understanding to give a body to them. He wooed Liberty as a youthful lover, but it was perhaps more as a mistress than a bride ; and he has since wedded with an elderly and not very reputable lady, called Legitimacy. *A wilful man*, according to the Scotch proverb, *must have his way*. If it were the cause to which he was sincerely attached, he would adhere to it through good report and evil report ; but it is himself to whom he does homage, and would have others do so ; and he therefore changes sides, rather than submit to apparent defeat or temporary mortification. Abstract principle has no rule but the understood distinction between right and wrong ; the indulgence of vanity, of caprice, or prejudice, is regulated by the convenience or bias of the

moment. The temperament of our politician's mind is poetical, not philosophical. He is more the creature of impulse, than he is of reflection. He invents the unreal, he embellishes the false with the glosses of fancy, but pays little attention to "the words of truth and soberness." His impressions are accidental, immediate, personal, instead of being permanent and universal. Of all mortals he is surely the most impatient of contradiction, even when he has completely turned the tables on himself. Is not this very inconsistency the reason? Is he not tenacious of his opinions, in proportion as they are brittle and hastily formed? Is he not jealous of the grounds of his belief, because he fears they will not bear inspection, or is conscious he has shifted them? Does he not confine others to the strict line of orthodoxy, because he has himself taken every liberty? Is he not afraid to look to the right or the left, lest he should see the ghosts of his former extravagances staring him in the face? Does he not refuse to tolerate the smallest shade of difference in others, because he feels that he

wants the utmost latitude of construction for differing so widely from himself? Is he not captious, dogmatical, petulant in delivering his sentiments, according as he has been inconsistent, rash, and fanciful in adopting them? He maintains that there can be no possible ground for differing from him, because he looks only at his own side of the question! He sets up his own favourite notions as the standard of reason and honesty, because he has changed from one extreme to another! He treats his opponents with contempt, because he is himself afraid of meeting with disrespect! He says that "a Reformer is a worse character than a house-breaker," in order to stifle the recollection that he himself once was one!

We must say that "we relish Mr. Southey more in the Reformer" than in his lately acquired, but by no means natural or becoming character of poet-laureat and courtier. He may rest assured that a garland of wild flowers suits him better than the laureat-wreath: that his pastoral odes and popular inscriptions were far more adapted to his ge-

nious than his presentation-poems. He is nothing akin to birth-day suits and drawing-room fopperies. "He is nothing, if not fantastical." In his figure, in his movements, in his sentiments, he is sharp and angular, quaint and eccentric. Mr. Southey is not of the court, courtly. Every thing of him and about him is from the people. He is not classical, he is not legitimate. He is not a man cast in the mould of other men's opinions : he is not shaped on any model : he bows to no authority : he yields only to his own wayward peculiarities. He is wild, irregular, singular, extreme. He is no formalist, not he ! All is crude and chaotic, self-opinionated, vain. He wants proportion, keeping, system, standard rules. He is not *terres et rotundus*. Mr. Southey walks with his chin erect through the streets of London, and with an umbrella sticking out under his arm, in the finest weather. He has not sacrificed to the Graces, nor studied decorum. With him every thing is projecting, starting from its place, an episode, a digression, a poetic license. He does not move in any given orbit, but, like a falling

star, shoots from his sphere. He is pragmatic, restless, unfixed, full of experiments, beginning every thing a-new, wiser than his betters, judging for himself, dictating to others. He is decidedly *revolutionary*. He may have given up the reform of the state : but depend upon it, he has some other *hobby* of the same kind. Does he not dedicate to his present Majesty that extraordinary poem on the death of his father, called *The Vision of Judgment*, as a specimen of what might be done in English hexameters? In a court-poem all should be trite and on an approved model. He might as well have presented himself at the levee in a fancy or masquerade dress. Mr. Southey was not *to try conclusions* with Majesty—still less on such an occasion. The extreme freedoms with departed greatness, the party-petulance carried to the Throne of Grace, the unchecked indulgence of private humour, the assumption of infallibility and even of the voice of Heaven in this poem, are pointed instances of what we have said. They show the singular state of over-excitement of Mr. Southey's mind, and the force of old

habits of independent and unbridled thinking, which cannot be kept down even in addressing his Sovereign! Look at Mr. Southey's larger poems, his *Kehama*, his *Thalaba*, his *Madoc*, his *Roderic*. Who will deny the spirit, the scope, the splendid imagery, the hurried and startling interest that pervades them? Who will say that they are not sustained on fictions wilder than his own *Glendoveer*, that they are not the daring creations of a mind curbed by no law, tamed by no fear, that they are not rather like the trances than the waking dreams of genius, that they are not the very paradoxes of poetry? All this is very well, very intelligible, and very harmless, if we regard the rank excrescences of Mr. Southey's poetry, like the red and blue flowers in corn, as the unweeded growth of a luxuriant and wandering fancy; or if we allow the yeasty workings of an ardent spirit to ferment and boil over—the variety, the boldness, the lively stimulus given to the mind may then atone for the violation of rules and the offences to bed-ridden authority; but not if our poetic libertine sets up for a law-giver

and judge, or an apprehender of vagrants in the regions either of taste or opinion. Our motley gentleman deserves the strait-waistcoat, if he is for setting others in the stocks of servility, or condemning them to the pillory for a new mode of rhyme or reason. Or if a composer of sacred Dramas on classic models, or a translator of an old Latin author (that will hardly bear translation), or a vamped-up of vapid cantos and Odes set to music, were to turn pander to prescription and palliater of every dull, incorrigible abuse, it would not be much to be wondered at or even regretted. But in Mr. Southey it was a lamentable falling-off. It is indeed to be deplored, it is a stain on genius, a blow to humanity, that the author of *Joan of Arc*—that work in which the love of Liberty is exhaled like the breath of spring, mild, balmy, heaven-born, that is full of tears and virgin-sighs, and yearnings of affection after truth and good, gushing warm and crimsoned from the heart—should ever after turn to folly, or become the advocate of a rotten cause. After giving up his heart to that subject, he

ought not (whatever others might do) ever to have set his foot within the threshold of a court. He might be sure that he would not gain forgiveness or favour by it, nor obtain a single cordial smile from greatness. All that Mr. Southey is or that he does best, is independent, spontaneous, free as the vital air he draws—when he affects the courtier or the sophist, he is obliged to put a constraint upon himself, to hold in his breath, he loses his genius, and offers a violence to his nature. His characteristic faults are the excess of a lively, unguarded temperament: — oh ! let them not degenerate into cold-blooded, heartless vices ! If we speak or have ever spoken of Mr. Southey with severity, it is with “ the malice of old friends,” for we count ourselves among his sincerest and heartiest well-wishers. But while he himself is anomalous, incalculable, eccentric, from youth to age (the *Wat Tyler* and the *Vision of Judgment* are the Alpha and Omega of his disjointed career) full of sallies of humour, of ebullitions of spleen, making *jets-d'eau*, cascades, fountains, and water-works of his

idle opinions, he would shut up the wits of others in leaden cisterns, to stagnate and corrupt, or bury them under ground—

“Far from the sun and summer gale!”

He would suppress the freedom of wit and humour, of which he has set the example, and claim a privilege for playing antics. He would introduce a uniformity of intellectual weights and measures of irregular metres and settled opinions, and enforce it with a high hand. This has been judged hard by some, and has brought down a severity of recrimination, perhaps disproportioned to the injury done. “Because he is virtuous” (it has been asked) “are there to be no more cakes and ale?” Because he is loyal, are we to take all our notions from the *Quarterly Review*? Because he is orthodox, are we to do nothing but read the *Book of the Church*? We declare we think his former poetical scepticism was not only more amiable, but had more of the spirit of religion in it, implied a more heartfelt trust in nature and providence than his present bigotry. We are at the same time

free to declare that we think his articles in the *Quarterly Review*, notwithstanding their virulence and the talent they display, have a tendency to qualify its most pernicious effects. They have redeeming traits in them. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump:" and the spirit of humanity (thanks to Mr. Southey) is not quite expelled from the *Quarterly Review*. At the corner of his pen, " there hangs a vapourous drop profound" of independence and liberality, which falls upon its pages, and oozes out through the pores of the public mind. There is a fortunate difference between writers whose hearts are naturally callous to truth, and whose understandings are hermetically sealed against all impressions but those of self-interest, and a man like Mr. Southey. *Once a philanthropist and always a philanthropist.* No man can entirely baulk his nature : it breaks out in spite of him. In all those questions, where the spirit of contradiction does not interfere, on which he is not sore from old bruises, or sick from the extravagance of youthful intoxication, as from a

last night's debauch, our "laureate" is still bold, free, candid, open to conviction, a reformist without knowing it. He does not advocate the slave-trade, he does not arm Mr. Malthus's revolting ratios with his authority, he does not strain hard to deluge Ireland with blood. On such points, where humanity has not become obnoxious, where liberty has not passed into a by-word, Mr. Southey is still liberal and humane. The elasticity of his spirit is unbroken : the bow recoils to its old position. He still stands convicted of his early passion for inquiry and improvement. He was not regularly articulated as a Government-tool!—Perhaps the most pleasing and striking of all Mr. Southey's poems are not his triumphant taunts hurled against oppression, are not his glowing effusions to Liberty, but those in which, with a mild melancholy, he seems conscious of his own infirmities of temper, and to feel a wish to correct by thought and time the precocity and sharpness of his disposition. May the quaint but affecting aspiration expressed in one of

these be fulfilled, that as he mellows into maturer age, all such asperities may wear off, and he himself become

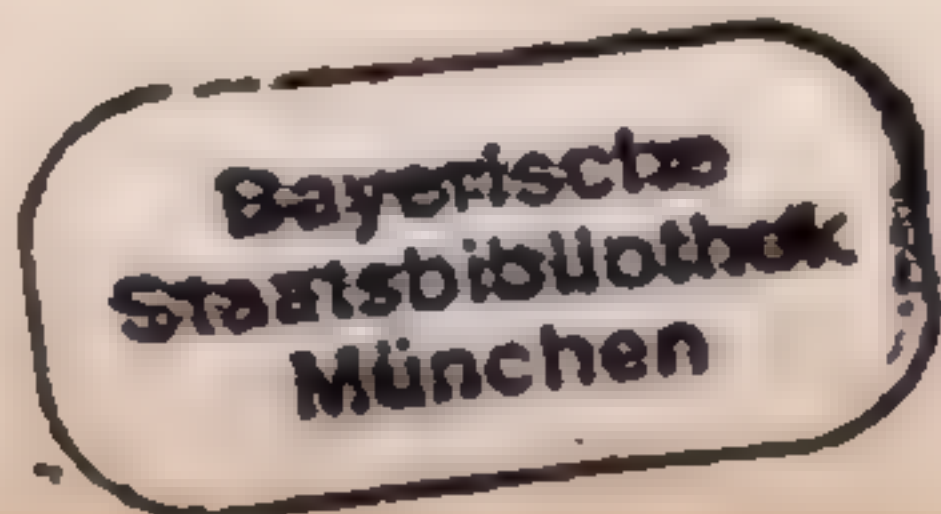
“ Like the high leaves upon the holly-tree !”

Mr. Southey's prose-style can scarcely be too much praised. It is plain, clear, pointed, familiar, perfectly modern in its texture, but with a grave and sparkling admixture of *archaisms* in its ornaments and occasional phraseology. He is the best and most natural prose writer of any poet of the day ; we mean that he is far better than Lord Byron, Mr. Wordsworth, or Mr. Coleridge, for instance. The manner is perhaps superior to the matter, that is, in his Essays and Reviews. There is rather a want of originality and even of *impetus* : but there is no want of playful or biting satire, of ingenuity, of casuistry, of learning and of information. He is “ full of wise saws and modern (as well as ancient) instances.” Mr. Southey may not always convince his opponents ; but he seldom fails to stagger, never to gall them. In a word, we may describe his style by saying that it has

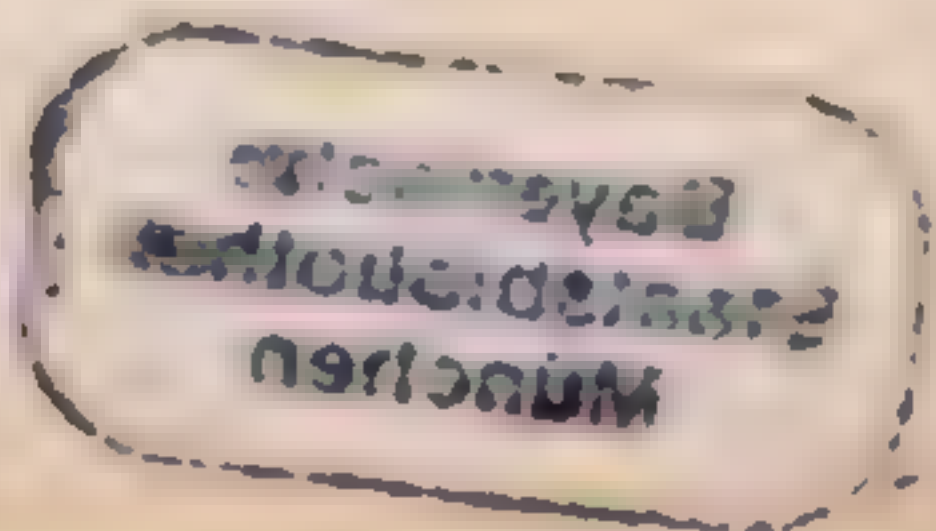
not the body or thickness of port wine, but is like clear sherry with kernels of old authors thrown into it!—He also excels as an historian and prose-translator. His histories abound in information, and exhibit proofs of the most indefatigable patience and industry. By no uncommon process of the mind, Mr. Southey seems willing to steady the extreme levity of his opinions and feelings by an appeal to facts. His translations of the Spanish and French romances are also executed *con amore*, and with the literal fidelity and care of a mere linguist. That of the *Cid*, in particular, is a master-piece. Not a word could be altered for the better, in the old scriptural style which it adopts in conformity to the original. It is no less interesting in itself, or as a record of high and chivalrous feelings and manners, than it is worthy of perusal as a literary curiosity.

Mr. Southey's conversation has a little resemblance to a common-place book; his habitual deportment to a piece of clock-work. He is not remarkable either as a reasoner or an observer: but he is quick, unaffected,

replete with anecdote, various and retentive in his reading, and exceedingly happy in his play upon words, as most scholars are who give their minds this sportive turn. We have chiefly seen Mr. Southey in company where few people appear to advantage, we mean in that of Mr. Coleridge. He has not certainly the same range of speculation, nor the same flow of sounding words, but he makes up by the details of knowledge, and by a scrupulous correctness of statement, for what he wants in originality of thought, or impetuous declamation. The tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice are eloquence: those of Mr. Southey are meagre, shrill, and dry. Mr. Coleridge's *forte* is conversation, and he is conscious of this: Mr. Southey evidently considers writing as his strong-hold, and if gravelled in an argument, or at a loss for an explanation, refers to something he has written on the subject, or brings out his port-folio, doubled down in dog-ears, in confirmation of some fact. He is scholastic and professional in his ideas. He sets more value on what he writes than on what he says: he is perhaps prouder



of his library than of his own productions—themselves a library! He is more simple in his manners than his friend Mr. Coleridge; but at the same time less cordial or conciliating. He is less vain, or has less hope of pleasing, and therefore lays himself less out to please. There is an air of condescension in his civility. With a tall, loose figure, a peaked austerity of countenance, and no inclination to *embonpoint*, you would say he has something puritanical, something ascetic in his appearance. He answers to Mandeville's description of Addison, "a parson in a tye-wig." He is not a boon companion, nor does he indulge in the pleasures of the table, nor in any other vice; nor are we aware that Mr. Southey is chargeable with any human frailty but—*want of charity*! Having fewer errors to plead guilty to, he is less lenient to those of others. He was born an age too late. Had he lived a century or two ago, he would have been a happy as well as blameless character. But the distraction of the time has unsettled him, and the multiplicity of his pretensions have jostled with each other. No



man in our day (at least no man of genius) has led so uniformly and entirely the life of a scholar from boyhood to the present hour, devoting himself to learning with the enthusiasm of an early love, with the severity and constancy of a religious vow—and well would it have been for him if he had confined himself to this, and not undertaken to pull down or to patch up the State! However irregular in his opinions, Mr. Southey is constant, unremitting, mechanical in his studies, and the performance of his duties. There is nothing Pindaric or Shandean here. In all the relations and charities of private life, he is correct, exemplary, generous, just. We never heard a single impropriety laid to his charge; and if he has many enemies, few men can boast more numerous or stauncher friends.—The variety and piquancy of his writings form a striking contrast to the mode in which they are produced. He rises early, and writes or reads till breakfast-time. He writes or reads after breakfast till dinner, after dinner till tea, and from tea till bed-time—

“ And follows so the ever-running year
With profitable labour to his grave—”

on Derwent's banks, beneath the foot of Skiddaw. Study serves him for business, exercise, recreation. He passes from verse to prose, from history to poetry, from reading to writing, by a stop-watch. He writes a fair hand, without blots, sitting upright in his chair, leaves off when he comes to the bottom of the page, and changes the subject for another, as opposite as the Antipodes. His mind is after all rather the recipient and transmitter of knowledge, than the originator of it. He has hardly grasp of thought enough to arrive at any great leading truth. His passions do not amount to more than irritability. With some gall in his pen, and coldness in his manner, he has a great deal of kindness in his heart. Rash in his opinions, he is steady in his attachments—and is a man, in many particulars admirable, in all respectable—his political inconsistency alone excepted!

MR. WORDSWORTH.

MR. WORDSWORTH's genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age. Had he lived in any other period of the world, he would never have been heard of. As it is, he has some difficulty to contend with the hebetude of his intellect, and the meanness of his subject. With him "lowliness is young ambition's ladder:" but he finds it a toil to climb in this way the steep of fame. His homely Muse can hardly raise her wing from the ground, nor spread her hid-

den glories to the sun. He has “no figures nor no fantasies, which busy *passion* draws in the brains of men:” neither the gorgeous machinery of mythologic lore, nor the splendid colours of poetic diction. His style is vernacular: he delivers household truths. He sees nothing loftier than human hopes; nothing deeper than the human heart. This he probes, this he tamps with, this he poises, with all its incalculable weight of thought and feeling, in his hands; and at the same time calms the throbbing pulses of his own heart, by keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature. If he can make the life-blood flow from the wounded breast, this is the living colouring with which he paints his verse: if he can assuage the pain or close up the wound with the balm of solitary musing, or the healing power of plants and herbs and “skyey influences,” this is the sole triumph of his art. He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract conditions inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them; and has perhaps succeeded as well as any one could. “*Nihil hu-*

mani a me alienum puto"—is the motto of his works. He thinks nothing low or indifferent of which this can be affirmed : every thing that professes to be more than this, that is not an absolute essence of truth and feeling, he holds to be vitiated, false, and spurious. In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length) between the natural and the artificial : between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and of the world !

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age : the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse (it cannot be denied, and without this we cannot explain its character at all) is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It is distinguished by a proud humility. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external show and relief. It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always

interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them. He takes a subject or a story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind.

His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: "the cloud-capt towers, the solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces," are swept to the ground, and "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin *denovo*, on a *tabula rasa* of poetry. The purple pall, the nodding plume of tragedy are exploded as mere pantomime and trick, to return to the simplicity of truth and nature. Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and

the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power, “the judge’s robe, the marshal’s truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones ’longs,” are not to be found here. The author tramples on the pride of art with greater pride. The Ode and Epode, the Strophe and the Antistrophe, he laughs to scorn. The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and of Alcæus are still. The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers. Neither does he avail himself of the advantages which nature or accident holds out to him. He chooses to have his subject a foil to his invention, to owe nothing but to himself. He gathers manna in the wilderness, he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the store of his own recollections. No

cypress-grove loads his verse with perfumes :
but his imagination lends “a sense of joy

“ To the bare trees and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.”

No storm, no shipwreck startles us by its horrors : but the rainbow lifts its head in the cloud, and the breeze sighs through the withered fern. No sad vicissitude of fate, no overwhelming catastrophe in nature deforms his page : but the dew-drop glitters on the bending flower, the tear collects in the glistening eye.

“ Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs are ready ; the dread strife
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

As the lark ascends from its low bed on fluttering wing, and salutes the morning skies ; so Mr. Wordsworth’s unpretending Muse, in russet guise, scales the summits of reflection, while it makes the round earth its footstool, and its home !

Possibly a good deal of this may be regarded as the effect of disappointed views and an inverted ambition. Prevented by native pride and indolence from climbing the ascent of learning or greatness, taught by political opinions to say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, "I hate ye," seeing the path of classical and artificial poetry blocked up by the cumbrous ornaments of style and turgid *common-places*, so that nothing more could be achieved in that direction but by the most ridiculous bombast or the tamest servility; he has turned back partly from the bias of his mind, partly perhaps from a judicious policy—has struck into the sequestered vale of humble life, sought out the Muse among sheep-cotes and hamlets and the peasant's mountain-haunts, has discarded all the tinsel pageantry of verse, and endeavoured (not in vain) to aggrandise the trivial and add the charm of novelty to the familiar. No one has shown the same imagination in raising trifles into importance: no one has displayed the same pathos in treating of the simplest feelings of the heart. Reserved, yet

haughty, having no unruly or violent passions, (or those passions having been early suppressed,) Mr. Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing, or in daily converse with the face of nature. He exemplifies in an eminent degree the power of *association*, for his poetry has no other source or character. He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. Every one is by habit and familiarity strongly attached to the place of his birth, or to objects that recall the most pleasing and eventful circumstances of his life. But to the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*, nature is a kind of home; and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe. There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his heart : no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years.—

“ To him the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye
as an old acquaintance : the cuckoo haunts

him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed : a linnet's nest startles him with boyish delight : an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections : a grey cloak, seen on some wild moor, torn by the wind, or drenched in the rain, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him : even the lichens on the rock have a life and being in his thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared : for they have no substitute elsewhere. The vulgar do not read them, the learned, who see all things through books, do not understand them, the great despise, the fashionable may ridicule them : but the author has created himself an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student of nature, which can never die. Persons of this class will still continue to feel what he has felt ; he has expressed what they

might in vain wish to express, except with glistening eye and faltering tongue! There is a lofty philosophic tone, a thoughtful humanity, infused into his pastoral vein. Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds. Nursed amidst the grandeur of mountain scenery, he has stooped to have a nearer view of the daisy under his feet, or plucked a branch of white-thorn from the spray: but in describing it, his mind seems imbued with the majesty and solemnity of the objects around him—the tall rock lifts its head in the erectness of his spirit; the cataract roars in the sound of his verse; and in its dim and mysterious meaning, the mists seem to gather in the hollows of Helvellyn, and the forked Skiddaw hovers in the distance. There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was

written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness, and its depth!

His later philosophic productions have a somewhat different character. They are a departure from, a dereliction of his first principles. They are classical and courtly. They are polished in style, without being gaudy; dignified in subject, without affectation. They seem to have been composed not in a cottage at Grasmere, but among the half-inspired groves and stately recollections of Cole-Orton. We might allude in particular, for examples of what we mean, to the lines on a Picture by Claude Lorraine, and to the exquisite poem, entitled *Laodamia*. The last of these breathes the pure spirit of the finest fragments of antiquity—the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty, and the languor of death—

“Calm Contemplation and majestic pains.”

Its glossy brilliancy arises from the perfection of the finishing, like that of careful sculpture, not from gaudy colouring—the texture of the

thoughts has the smoothness and solidity of marble. It is a poem that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it! Mr. Wordsworth's philosophic poetry, with a less glowing aspect and less tumult in the veins than Lord Byron's on similar occasions, bends a calmer and keener eye on mortality; the impression, if less vivid, is more pleasing and permanent; and we confess it (perhaps it is a want of taste and proper feeling) that there are lines and poems of our author's, that we think of ten times for once that we recur to any of Lord Byron's. Or if there are any of the latter's writings that we can dwell upon in the same way, that is, as lasting and heart-felt sentiments, it is when laying aside his usual pomp and pretension, he descends with Mr. Wordsworth to the common ground of a disinterested humanity. It may be considered as characteristic of our poet's writings, that they either make no impression on the mind at all, seem mere *nonsense-verses*, or that they leave a mark behind them that never wears out. They either

“ Fall blunted from the indurated breast”—

without any perceptible result, or they absorb it like a passion. To one class of readers he appears sublime, to another (and we fear the largest) ridiculous. He has probably realised Milton's wish,—“ and fit audience found, though few :” but we suspect he is not reconciled to the alternative. There are delightful passages in the *Excursion*, both of natural description and of inspired reflection (passages of the latter kind that in the sound of the thoughts and of the swelling language resemble heavenly symphonies, mournful *requiems* over the grave of human hopes); but we must add, in justice and in sincerity, that we think it impossible that this work should ever become popular, even in the same degree as the *Lyrical Ballads*. It affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one; and instead of unfolding a principle in various and striking lights, repeats the same conclusions till they become flat and insipid. Mr. Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings: it is not analytic, but synthetic; it

is reflecting, rather than theoretical. The EXCURSION, we believe, fell still-born from the press. There was something abortive, and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages, for the most part, were low, the fare rustic : the plan raised expectations which were not fulfilled, and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even *toujours perdrix!*

Mr. Wordsworth, in his person, is above the middle size, with marked features, and an air somewhat stately and Quixotic. He reminds one of some of Holbein's heads, grave, saturnine, with a slight indication of sly humour, kept under by the manners of the age or by the pretensions of the person. He has a peculiar sweetness in his smile, and great depth and manliness and a rugged harmony in the tones of his voice. His manner of reading his own poetry is particularly imposing ; and in his favourite passages his eye beams with preter-

natural lustre, and the meaning labours slowly up from his swelling breast. No one who has seen him at these moments could go away with an impression that he was a “man of no mark or likelihood.” Perhaps the comment of his face and voice is necessary to convey a full idea of his poetry. His language may not be intelligible, but his manner is not to be mistaken. It is clear that he is either mad or inspired. In company, even in a *tête-à-tête*, Mr. Wordsworth is often silent, indolent, and reserved. If he is become verbose and oracular of late years, he was not so in his better days. He threw out a bold or an indifferent remark without either effort or pretension, and relapsed into musing again. He shone most (because he seemed most roused and animated) in reciting his own poetry, or in talking about it. He sometimes gave striking views of his feelings and trains of association in composing certain passages; or if one did not always understand his distinctions, still there was no want of interest—there was a latent meaning worth inquiring into, like a vein of ore that one cannot exactly hit upon at the moment,

but of which there are sure indications. His standard of poetry is high and severe, almost to exclusiveness. He admits of nothing below, scarcely of any thing above himself. It is fine to hear him talk of the way in which certain subjects should have been treated by eminent poets, according to his notions of the art. Thus he finds fault with Dryden's description of Bacchus in the *Alexander's Feast*, as if he were a mere good-looking youth, or boon companion—

“ Flushed with a purple grace,
He shows his honest face”—

instead of representing the God returning from the conquest of India, crowned with vine-leaves, and drawn by panthers, and followed by troops of satyrs, of wild men and animals that he had tamed. You would think, in hearing him speak on this subject, that you saw Titian's picture of the meeting of *Bacchus and Ariadne*—so classic were his conceptions, so glowing his style. Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His Sonnets, indeed, have some-

thing of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit. Chaucer is another prime favourite of his, and he has been at the pains to modernise some of the Canterbury Tales. Those persons who look upon Mr. Wordsworth as a merely puerile writer, must be rather at a loss to account for his strong predilection for such geniuses as Dante and Michael Angelo. We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakspeare. How should he? Shakspeare was the least of an egotist of any body in the world. He does not much relish the variety and scope of dramatic composition. "He hates those interlocations between Lucius and Caius." Yet Mr. Wordsworth himself wrote a tragedy when he was young; and we have heard the following energetic lines quoted from it, as put into the mouth of a person smit with remorse for some rash crime :

—————" Action is momentary,
The motion of a muscle this way or that;
Suffering is long, obscure, and infinite !"

Perhaps for want of light and shade, and the unshackled spirit of the drama, this perform-

ance was never brought forward. Our critic has a great dislike to Gray, and a fondness for Thomson and Collins. It is mortifying to hear him speak of Pope and Dryden, whom, because they have been supposed to have all the possible excellences of poetry, he will allow to have none. Nothing, however, can be fairer, or more amusing, than the way in which he sometimes exposes the unmeaning verbiage of modern poetry. Thus, in the beginning of Dr. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*—

“ Let observation with extensive view
Survey mankind from China to Peru”—

he says there is a total want of imagination accompanying the words, the same idea is repeated three times under the disguise of a different phraseology : it comes to this—
“let *observation*, with extensive *observation*,
observe mankind ;” or take away the first line, and the second,

“ Survey mankind from China to Peru,”

literally conveys the whole. Mr. Wordsworth is, we must say, a perfect Drawcansir as to

prose writers. He complains of the dry reasoners and matter-of-fact people for their want of *passion*; and he is jealous of the rhetorical declaimers and rhapsodists as trenching on the province of poetry. He condemns all French writers (as well of poetry as prose) in the lump. His list in this way is indeed small. He approves of Walton's Angler, Paley, and some other writers of an inoffensive modesty of pretension. He also likes books of voyages and travels, and Robinson Crusoe. In art, he greatly esteems Bewick's wood-cuts, and Waterloo's sylvan etchings. But he sometimes takes a higher tone, and gives his mind fair play. We have known him enlarge with a noble intelligence and enthusiasm on Nicolas Poussin's fine landscape-compositions, pointing out the unity of design that pervades them, the superintending mind, the imaginative principle that brings all to bear on the same end; and declaring he would not give a rush for any landscape that did not express the time of day, the climate, the period of the world it was meant to illustrate, or had not this character

of *wholeness* in it. His eye also does justice to Rembrandt's fine and masterly effects. In the way in which that artist works something out of nothing, and transforms the stump of a tree, a common figure into an *ideal* object, by the gorgeous light and shade thrown upon it, he perceives an analogy to his own mode of investing the minute details of nature with an atmosphere of sentiment; and in pronouncing Rembrandt to be a man of genius, feels that he strengthens his own claim to the title. It has been said of Mr. Wordsworth, that "he hates conchology, that he hates the Venus of Medicis." But these, we hope, are mere epigrams and *jeux-d'esprit*, as far from truth as they are free from malice; a sort of running satire or critical clenches—

"Where one for sense and one for rhyme
Is quite sufficient at one time."

We think, however, that if Mr. Wordsworth had been a more liberal and candid critic, he would have been a more sterling writer. If a greater number of sources of pleasure had

been open to him, he would have communicated pleasure to the world more frequently. Had he been less fastidious in pronouncing sentence on the works of others, his own would have been received more favourably, and treated more leniently. The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow ; the range of his understanding is lofty and aspiring rather than discursive. The force, the originality, the absolute truth and identity with which he feels some things, makes him indifferent to so many others. The simplicity and enthusiasm of his feelings, with respect to nature, renders him bigoted and intolerant in his judgments of men and things. But it happens to him, as to others, that his strength lies in his weakness ; and perhaps we have no right to complain. We might get rid of the cynic and the egotist, and find in his stead a common-place man. We should “take the good the Gods provide us :” a fine and original vein of poetry is not one of their most contemptible gifts, and the rest is scarcely worth thinking of, except as it may be a mortification to those who expect

perfection from human nature ; or who have been idle enough at some period of their lives, to deify men of genius as possessing claims above it. But this is a chord that jars, and we shall not dwell upon it.

Lord Byron we have called, according to the old proverb, “the spoiled child of fortune :” Mr. Wordsworth might plead, in mitigation of some peculiarities, that he is “the spoiled child of disappointment.” We are convinced, if he had been early a popular poet, he would have borne his honours meekly, and would have been a person of great *bonhomie* and frankness of disposition. But the sense of injustice and of undeserved ridicule sours the temper and narrows the views. To have produced works of genius, and to find them neglected or treated with scorn, is one of the heaviest trials of human patience. We exaggerate our own merits when they are denied by others, and are apt to grudge and cavil at every particle of praise bestowed on those to whom we feel a conscious superiority. In mere self-defence we turn against the world,

when it turns against us ; brood over the undeserved slights we receive ; and thus the genial current of the soul is stopped, or vents itself in effusions of petulance and self-conceit. Mr. Wordsworth has thought too much of contemporary critics and criticism ; and less than he ought of the award of posterity, and of the opinion, we do not say of private friends, but of those who were made so by their admiration of his genius. He did not court popularity by a conformity to established models, and he ought not to have been surprised that his originality was not understood as a matter of course. He has *gnawed too much on the bridle* ; and has often thrown out crusts to the critics, in mere defiance or as a point of honour when he was challenged, which otherwise his own good sense would have withheld. We suspect that Mr. Wordsworth's feelings are a little morbid in this respect, or that he resents censure more than he is gratified by praise. Otherwise, the tide has turned much in his favour of late years—he has a large body of determined partisans—and is

at present sufficiently in request with the public to save or relieve him from the last necessity to which a man of genius can be reduced—that of becoming the God of his own idolatry!

MR. CAMPBELL* AND MR. CRABBE.

MR. CAMPBELL may be said to hold a place (among modern poets) between Lord Byron and Mr. Rogers. With much of the glossy splendour, the pointed vigour, and romantic interest of the one, he possesses the fastidious refinement, the classic elegance of the other. Mr. Rogers, as a writer, is too effeminate, Lord Byron too extravagant: Mr. Campbell

* The character of Mr. Campbell was contributed by a friend.

is neither. The author of the *Pleasures of Memory* polishes his lines till they sparkle with the most exquisite finish ; he attenuates them into the utmost degree of trembling softness : but we may complain, in spite of the delicacy and brilliancy of the execution, of a want of strength and solidity. The author of the *Pleasures of Hope*, with a richer and deeper vein of thought and imagination, works it out into figures of equal grace and dazzling beauty, avoiding on the one hand the tinsel of flimsy affectation, and on the other the vices of a rude and barbarous negligence. His Pegasus is not a rough, skittish colt, running wild among the mountains, covered with bur-docks and thistles, nor a tame, sleek pad, unable to get out of the same ambling pace, but a beautiful *manege*-horse, full of life and spirit in itself, and subject to the complete control of the rider. Mr. Campbell gives scope to his feelings and his fancy, and embodies them in a noble and naturally interesting subject ; and he at the same time conceives himself called upon (in these days of critical nicety) to pay the exactest attention to

the expression of each thought, and to modulate each line into the most faultless harmony. The character of his mind is a lofty and self-scrutinising ambition, that strives to reconcile the integrity of general design with the perfect elaboration of each component part, that aims at striking effect, but is jealous of the means by which this is to be produced. Our poet is not averse to popularity (nay, he is tremblingly alive to it)—but self-respect is the primary law, the indispensable condition on which it must be obtained. We should dread to point out (even if we could) a false concord, a mixed metaphor, an imperfect rhyme in any of Mr. Campbell's productions; for we think that all his fame would hardly compensate to him for the discovery. He seeks for perfection, and nothing evidently short of it can satisfy his mind. He is a *high finisher* in poetry, whose every work must bear inspection, whose slightest touch is precious—not a coarse dauber who is contented to impose on public wonder and credulity by some huge, ill-executed design, or who endeavours to wear out patience and opposition together

by a load of lumbering, feeble, awkward, improgressive lines—on the contrary, Mr. Campbell labours to lend every grace of execution to his subject, while he borrows his ardour and inspiration from it, and to deserve the laurels he has earned, by true genius and by true pains. There is an apparent consciousness of this in most of his writings. He has attained to great excellence by aiming at the greatest, by a cautious and yet daring selection of topics, and by studiously (and with a religious horror) avoiding all those faults which arise from grossness, vulgarity, haste, and disregard of public opinion. He seizes on the highest point of eminence, and strives to keep it to himself—he “snatches a grace beyond the reach of art,” and will not let it go—he steeps a single thought or image so deep in the Tyrian dyes of a gorgeous imagination, that it throws its lustre over a whole page—every where vivid *ideal* forms hover (in intense conception) over the poet’s verse, which ascends, like the aloe, to the clouds, with pure flowers at its top. Or to take an humbler comparison (the pride of genius must

sometimes stoop to the lowliness of criticism) Mr. Campbell's poetry often reminds us of the purple gilliflower, both for its colour and its scent, its glowing warmth, its rich, languid, sullen hue,

“ Yet sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath!”

There are those who complain of the little that Mr. Campbell has done in poetry, and who seem to insinuate that he is deterred by his own reputation from making any further or higher attempts. But after having produced two poems that have gone to the heart of a nation, and are gifts to a world, he may surely linger out the rest of his life in a dream of immortality. There are moments in our lives so exquisite that all that remains of them afterwards seems useless and barren; and there are lines and stanzas in our author's early writings in which he may be thought to have exhausted all the sweetness and all the essence of poetry, so that nothing further was left to his efforts or his ambition. Happy is it for those few and fortunate worshippers of the

Muse (not a subject of grudging or envy to others) who already enjoy in their life-time a foretaste of their future fame, who see their names accompanying them, like a cloud of glory, from youth to age,

“ And by the vision splendid,
Are on their way attended”—

and who know that they have built a shrine for the thoughts and feelings, that were most dear to them, in the minds and memories of other men, till the language which they lisped in childhood is forgotten, or the human heart shall beat no more!

The *Pleasures of Hope* alone would not have called forth these remarks from us, but there are passages in the *Gertrude of Wyoming* of so rare and ripe a beauty, that they challenge, as they exceed all praise. Such, for instance, is the following peerless description of Gertrude's childhood :—

“ A loved bequest—and I may half impart
To those that feel the strong paternal tie,
How like a new existence in his heart
That living flow'r uprose beneath his eye,

Dear as she was, from cherub infancy,
From hours when she would round his garden play,
To time when as the ripening years went by,
Her lovely mind could culture well repay,
And more engaging grew from pleasing day to day.

I may not paint those thousand infant charms
(Unconscious fascination, undesigned!)
The orison repeated in his arms,
For God to bless her sire and all mankind;
The book, the bosom on his knee reclined,
Or how sweet fairy-love he heard her con
(The play-mate ere the teacher of her mind)
All uncompanion'd else her years had gone,
Till now in Gertrude's eyes their ninth blue summer
shone.

And summer was the tide, and sweet the hour,
When sire and daughter saw with fleet descent,
An Indian from his bark approach their bower,
Of buskin'd limb and swarthy lineament;
The red wild feathers on his brow were blent,
And bracelets bound the arm that help'd to light
A boy, who seem'd, as he beside him went,
Of Christian vesture and complexion bright,
Led by his dusty guide, like morning brought by night."

In the foregoing stanzas we particularly admire
the line—

"Till now in Gertrude's eyes their ninth blue summer shone."

It appears to us like the ecstatic union of
natural beauty and poetic fancy, and in its

playful sublimity resembles the azure canopy mirrored in the smiling waters, bright, liquid, serene, heavenly ! A great outcry, we know, has prevailed for some time past against poetic diction and affected conceits, and, to a certain degree, we go along with it ; but this must not prevent us from feeling the thrill of pleasure when we see beauty linked to beauty, like kindred flame to flame, or from applauding the voluptuous fancy that raises and adorns the fairy fabric of thought, that nature has begun ! Pleasure is “scattered in stray-gifts o’er the earth” —beauty streaks the “famous poet’s page” in occasional lines of inconceivable brightness ; and wherever this is the case, no splenetic censures or “jealous leer malign,” no idle theories or cold indifference should hinder us from greeting it with rapture.—There are other parts of this poem equally delightful, in which there is a light startling as the red-bird’s wing ; a perfume like that of the magnolia ; a music like the murmuring of pathless woods or of the everlasting ocean. We conceive, however, that Mr. Campbell excels chiefly in sentiment and imagery. The story moves slow, and is me-

chanically conducted, and rather resembles a Scotch canal carried over lengthened aqueducts and with a number of *locks* in it, than one of those rivers that sweep in their majestic course, broad and full, over Transatlantic plains and lose themselves in rolling gulfs, or thunder down lofty precipices. But in the centre, the inmost recesses of our poet's heart, the pearly dew of sensibility is distilled and collects, like the diamond in the mine, and the structure of his fame rests on the crystal columns of a polished imagination. We prefer the *Gertrude* to the *Pleasures of Hope*, because with perhaps less brilliancy, there is more of tenderness and natural imagery in the former. In the *Pleasures of Hope* Mr. Campbell had not completely emancipated himself from the trammels of the more artificial style of poetry—from epigram, and antithesis, and hyperbole. The best line in it, in which earthly joys are said to be—

“ Like angels' visits, few and far between.—

is a borrowed one.* But in the *Gertrude of Wyoming* “ we perceive a softness coming over

* “ Like angels' visits, short and far between,”

Blair's Grave.

the heart of the author, and the scales and crust of formality that fence in his couplets and give them a somewhat glittering and rigid appearance, fall off," and he has succeeded in engrafting the wild and more expansive interest of the romantic school of poetry on classic elegance and precision. After the poem we have just named, Mr. Campbell's SONGS are the happiest efforts of his Muse :—breathing freshness, blushing like the morn, they seem, like clustering roses, to weave a chaplet for love and liberty; or their bleeding words gush out in mournful and hurried succession, like "ruddy drops that visit the sad heart" of thoughtful Humanity. The *Battle of Hohenlinden* is of all modern compositions the most lyrical in spirit and in sound. To justify this encomium, we need only recall the lines to the reader's memory.

“ On Linden, when the sun was low,
All bloodless lay the untrodden snow.
And dark as winter was the flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.
But Linden saw another sight,
When the drum beat at dead of night,
Commanding fires of death to light
The darkness of her scenery.

By torch and trumpet fast array'd,
Each horseman drew his battle blade,
And furious every charger neigh'd,
To join the dreadful revelry.

Then shook the hills with thunder riv'n,
Then rush'd the steed to battle driv'n,
And louder than the bolts of heav'n
Far flash'd the red artillery.

But redder yet that light shall glow
On Linden's hills of stained snow,
And bloodier yet the torrent flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.

'Tis morn, but scarce yon level sun
Can pierce the war-clouds, rolling^{*} dun,
Where furious Frank and fiery Hun
Shout in their sulph'rous canopy.

The combat deepens. On, ye brave,
Who rush to glory, or the grave!
Wave, Munich! all thy banners wave!
And charge with all thy chivalry!

Few, few shall part where many meet!
The snow shall be their winding-sheet,
And every turf beneath their feet
Shall be a soldier's sepulchre."

* Is not this word, which occurs in the last line but one, (as well as before) an instance of that repetition, which we so often meet with in the most correct and elegant writers?

Mr. Campbell's prose-criticisms on contemporary and other poets (which have appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*) are in a style at once chaste, temperate, guarded, and just.

Mr. Crabbe presents an entire contrast to Mr. Campbell :—the one is the most ambitious and aspiring of living poets, the other the most humble and prosaic. If the poetry of the one is like the arch of the rainbow, spanning and adorning the earth, that of the other is like a dull, leaden cloud hanging over it. Mr. Crabbe's style might be cited as an answer to Audrey's question—"Is poetry a true thing?" There are here no ornaments, no flights of fancy, no illusions of sentiment, no tinsel of words. His song is one sad reality, one unraised, unvaried note of unavailing woe. Literal fidelity serves him in the place of invention ; he assumes importance by a number of petty details ; he rivets attention by being tedious. He not only deals in incessant matters of fact, but in matters of fact of the most familiar, the least animating, and the most unpleasant kind ; but he relies for the effect of novelty on the microscopic minuteness with which he dissects the most

trivial objects—and for the interest he excites, on the unshrinking determination with which he handles the most painful. His poetry has an official and professional air. He is called in to cases of difficult births, of fractured limbs, or breaches of the peace; and makes out a parochial list of accidents and offences. He takes the most trite, the most gross and obvious and revolting part of nature, for the subject of his elaborate descriptions; but it is Nature still, and Nature is a great and mighty Goddess! It is well for the reverend Author that it is so. Individuality is, in his theory, the only definition of poetry. Whatever is, he hitches into rhyme. Whoever makes an exact image of any thing on the earth, however deformed or insignificant, according to him, must succeed—and he himself has succeeded. Mr. Crabbe is one of the most popular and admired of our living authors. That he is so, can be accounted for on no other principle than the strong ties that bind us to the world about us, and our involuntary yearnings after whatever in any manner powerfully and directly reminds us of it. His Muse is not one of *the Daughters*

of Memory, but the old toothless, mumbling dame herself, doling out the gossip and scandal of the neighbourhood, recounting *totidem verbis et literis*, what happens in every place of the kingdom every hour in the year, and fastening always on the worst as the most palatable morsels. But she is a circumstantial old lady, communicative, scrupulous, leaving nothing to the imagination, harping on the smallest grievances, a village-oracle and critic, most veritable, most identical, bringing us acquainted with persons and things just as they chanced to exist, and giving us a local interest in all she knows and tells. Mr. Crabbe's Helicon is choked up with weeds and corruption; it reflects no light from heaven, it emits no cheerful sound: no flowers of love, of hope, or joy, spring up near it, or they bloom only to wither in a moment. Our poet's verse does not put a spirit of youth in every thing, but a spirit of fear, despondency, and decay: it is not an electric spark to kindle or expand, but acts like the torpedo's touch to deaden or contract. It lends no dazzling tints to fancy, it aids no soothing feelings in

the heart, it gladdens no prospect, it stirs no wish; in its view the current of life runs slow, dull, cold, dispirited, half under ground, muddy, and clogged with all creeping things. The world is one vast infirmary; the hill of Parnassus is a penitentiary, of which our author is the overseer: to read him is a penance, yet we read on! Mr. Crabbe, it must be confessed, is a repulsive writer. He contrives to “turn diseases to commodities,” and makes a virtue of necessity. He puts us out of conceit with this world, which perhaps a severe divine should do; yet does not, as a charitable divine ought, point to another. His morbid feelings droop and cling to the earth, grovel where they should soar, and throw a dead weight on every aspiration of the soul after the good or beautiful. By degrees we submit, and are reconciled to our fate, like patients to the physician, or prisoners in the condemned cell. We can only explain this by saying, as we said before, that Mr. Crabbe gives us one part of nature, the mean, the little, the disgusting, the distressing; that he does this thoroughly and like a master, and we forgive all the rest.

Mr. Crabbe's first poems were published so long ago as the year 1782, and received the approbation of Dr. Johnson only a little before he died. This was a testimony from an enemy ; for Dr. Johnson was not an admirer of the simple in style or minute in description. Still he was an acute, strong-minded man, and could see truth when it was presented to him, even through the mist of his prejudices and his foibles. There was something in Mr. Crabbe's intricate points that did not, after all, so ill accord with the Doctor's purblind vision ; and he knew quite enough of the petty ills of life to judge of the merit of our poet's descriptions, though he himself chose to slur them over in high-sounding dogmas or general invectives. Mr. Crabbe's earliest poem of the *Village* was recommended to the notice of Dr. Johnson by Sir Joshua Reynolds ; and we cannot help thinking that a taste for that sort of poetry, which leans for support on the truth and fidelity of its imitations of nature, began to display itself much about that time, and, in a good measure, in consequence of the direction of the public taste

to the subject of painting. Book-learning, the accumulation of wordy common-places, the gaudy pretensions of poetical fiction, had enfeebled and perverted our eye for nature. The study of the fine arts, which came into fashion about forty years ago, and was then first considered as a polite accomplishment, would tend imperceptibly to restore it. Painting is essentially an imitative art; it cannot subsist for a moment on empty generalities: the critic, therefore, who had been used to this sort of substantial entertainment, would be disposed to read poetry with the eye of a connoisseur, would be little captivated with smooth, polished, unmeaning periods, and would turn with double eagerness and relish to the force and precision of individual details, transferred, as it were, to the page from the canvas. Thus an admirer of Teniers or Hobbima might think little of the pastoral sketches of Pope or Goldsmith; even Thomson describes not so much the naked object as what he sees in his mind's eye, surrounded and glowing with the mild, bland, genial vapours of his brain:—but the adept in Dutch interiors,

hovels, and pig-styes must find in Mr. Crabbe a man after his own heart. He is the very thing itself; he paints in words instead of colours: there is no other difference. As Mr. Crabbe is not a painter, only because he does not use a brush and colours, so he is for the most part a poet, only because he writes in lines of ten syllables. All the rest might be found in a newspaper, an old magazine, or a county - register. Our author is himself a little jealous of the prudish fidelity of his homely Muse, and tries to justify himself by precedents. He brings as a parallel instance of merely literal description, Pope's lines on the gay Duke of Buckingham, beginning "In the worst inn's worst room see Villiers lies!" But surely nothing can be more dissimilar. Pope describes what is striking, Crabbe would have described merely what was there. The objects in Pope stand out to the fancy from the mixture of the mean with the gaudy, from the contrast of the scene and the character. There is an appeal to the imagination; you see what is passing in a poetical point of view. In Crabbe there is no foil, no contrast, no im-

pulse given to the mind. It is all on a level and of a piece. In fact, there is so little connection between the subject-matter of Mr. Crabbe's lines and the ornament of rhyme which is tacked to them, that many of his verses read like serious burlesque, and the parodies which have been made upon them are hardly so quaint as the originals.

Mr. Crabbe's great fault is certainly that he is a sickly, a querulous, a uniformly dissatisfied poet. He sings the country ; and he sings it in a pitiful tone. He chooses this subject only to take the charm out of it, and to dispel the illusion, the glory, and the dream, which had hovered over it in golden verse from Theocritus to Cowper. He sets out with professing to overturn the theory which had hallowed a shepherd's life, and made the names of grove and valley music to our ears, in order to give us truth in its stead ; but why not lay aside the fool's cap and bells at once ? Why not insist on the unwelcome reality in plain prose ? If our author is a poet, why trouble himself with statistics ? If he is a statistic writer, why set his ill news to harsh

and grating verse? The philosopher in painting the dark side of human nature may have reason on his side, and a moral lesson or remedy in view. The tragic poet, who shows the sad vicissitudes of things and the disappointments of the passions, at least strengthens our yearnings after imaginary good, and lends wings to our desires, by which we, “at one bound, high overleap all bound,” of actual suffering. But Mr. Crabbe does neither. He gives us discoloured paintings of life; helpless, repining, unprofitable, unedifying distress. He is not a philosopher, but a sophist, a misanthrope in verse; a *namby-pamby* Mandeville, a Malthus turned metrical romancer. He professes historical fidelity; but his vein is not dramatic; nor does he give us the *pros* and *cons* of that versatile gipsy, Nature. He does not indulge his fancy, or sympathise with us or tell us how the poor feel; but how he should feel in their situation, which we do not want to know. He does not weave the web of their lives of a mingled yarn, good and ill together, but clothes them all in the same dingy linsey-woolsey, or

tinges them with a green and yellow melancholy. He blocks out all possibility of good, cancels the hope, or even the wish for it as a weakness; check-mates Tityrus and Virgil at the game of pastoral cross-purposes, disables all his adversary's white pieces, and leaves none but black ones on the board. The situation of a country clergyman is not necessarily favourable to the cultivation of the Muse. He is set down, perhaps, as he thinks, in a small curacy for life, and he takes his revenge by imprisoning the reader's imagination in luckless verse. Shut out from social converse, from learned colleges and halls, where he passed his youth, he has no cordial fellow-feeling with the unlettered manners of the *Village* or the *Borough*; and he describes his neighbours as more uncomfortable and discontented than himself. All this while he dedicates successive volumes to rising generations of noble patrons; and while he desolates a line of coast with sterile, blighting lines, the only leaf of his books where honour, beauty, worth, or pleasure bloom, is that inscribed to the Rutland family! We might

adduce instances of what we have said from every page of his works : let one suffice—

“ Thus by himself compelled to live each day,
To wait for certain hours the tide’s delay ;
At the same times the same dull views to see,
The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree ;
The water only when the tides were high,
When low, the mud half-covered and half-dry ;
The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,
And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks ;
Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,
As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.
When tides were neap, and in the sultry day,
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
Which on each side rose swelling, and below
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow ;
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide
In its hot slimy channel slowly glide ;
Where the small eels, that left the deeper way
For the warm shore, within the shallows play ;
Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,
Slope their slow passage to the fall’n flood :
Here dull and hopeless he’d lie down and trace
How side-long crabs had crawled their crooked race ;
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye ;
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,
Gave from the salt ditch-side the bellowing boom :
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice ;

Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,
Ran with a dull, unvaried, saddening sound;
Where all, presented to the eye or ear,
Oppressed the soul with misery, grief, and fear."

This is an exact *fac-simile* of some of the most unlovely parts of the creation. Indeed the whole of Mr. Crabbe's *Borough*, from which the above passage is taken, is done so to the life, that it seems almost like some sea-monster, crawled out of the neighbouring slime, and harbouring a breed of strange vermin, with a strong local scent of tar and bulgewater. Mr. Crabbe's *Tales* are more readable than his *Poems*; but in proportion as the interest increases, they become more oppressive. They turn, one and all, upon the same sort of teasing, helpless, mechanical, unimaginative distress;—and though it is not easy to lay them down, you never wish to take them up again. Still, in this way, they are highly finished, striking, and original portraits, worked out with an eye to nature, and an intimate knowledge of the small and intricate folds of the human heart. Some of the best are the *Confidant*, the story of *Silly Shore*,

the *Young Poet*, the *Painter*. The episode of *Phœbe Dawson* in the *Village*, is one of the most tender and pensive; and the character of the methodist parson who persecutes the sailor's widow with his godly, selfish love, is one of the most profound. In a word, if Mr. Crabbe's writings do not add greatly to the store of entertaining and delightful fiction, yet they will remain "as a thorn in the side of poetry," perhaps for a century to come!

JEREMY BENTHAM.

MR. BENTHAM is one of those persons who verify the old adage, that "A prophet has no honour, except out of his own country." His reputation lies at the circumference; and the lights of his understanding are reflected, with increasing lustre, on the other side of the globe. His name is little known in England, better in Europe, best of all in the plains of Chili and the mines of Mexico. He has offered constitutions for the New World, and legis-

lated for future times. The people of Westminster, where he lives, hardly know of such a person ; but the Siberian savage has received cold comfort from his lunar aspect ; the tawny Indian may hold out the hand of fellowship to him across the GREAT PACIFIC. We believe that the Empress Catherine corresponded with him ; and we know that the Emperor Alexander called upon him, and presented him with his miniature in a gold snuff-box, which the philosopher, to his eternal honour, returned. Mr. Hobhouse is a greater man at the hustings, Lord Rolle at Plymouth Dock ; but Mr. Bentham would carry it hollow, on the score of popularity, at Paris or Pegu. The reason is, that our author's influence is purely intellectual. He has devoted his life to the pursuit of abstract and general truths, and to those studies—

“ That waft a *thought* from Indus to the Pole”—

and has never mixed himself up with personal intrigues or party politics. He once, indeed, stuck up a hand-bill to say that he (Jeremy Bentham) being of sound mind, was of opi-

nion that Sir Samuel Romilly was the most proper person to represent Westminster ; but this was the whim of the moment. Otherwise, his reasonings, if true at all, are true every where alike : his speculations concern humanity at large, and are not confined to the hundred or the bills of mortality. It is in moral as in physical magnitude. The little is seen best near : the great appears in its proper dimensions, only from a more commanding point of view, and gains strength with time, and elevation from distance !

Mr. Bentham is very much among philosophers what La Fontaine was among poets :—in general habits and in all but his professional pursuits, he is a mere child. He has lived for the last forty years in a house in Westminster, overlooking the Park, like an anchorite in his cell, reducing law to a system, and the mind of man to a machine. He scarcely ever goes out, and sees very little company. The favoured few, who have the privilege of the *entrée*, are always admitted one by one. He does not like to have witnesses to his conversation. He talks a great deal,

and listens to nothing but facts. When any one calls upon him, he invites them to take a turn round his garden with him (Mr. Bentham is an economist of his time, and sets apart this portion of it to air and exercise)—and there you may see the lively old man, his mind still buoyant with thought and with the prospect of futurity, in eager conversation with some Opposition Member, some expatriated Patriot, or Transatlantic Adventurer, urging the extinction of Close Boroughs, or planning a code of laws for some “lone island in the watery waste,” his walk almost amounting to a run, his tongue keeping pace with it in shrill, clattering accents, negligent of his person, his dress, and his manner, intent only on his grand theme of UTILITY—or pausing, perhaps, for want of breath and with lack-lustre eye to point out to the stranger a stone in the wall at the end of his garden (overarched by two beautiful cotton-trees) *Inscribed to the Prince of Poets*, which marks the house where Milton formerly lived. To show how little the refinements of taste or fancy enter into our author’s system, he proposed at one time

to cut down these beautiful trees, to convert the garden where he had breathed the air of Truth and Heaven for near half a century into a paltry *Chreistomathic School*, and to make Milton's house (the cradle of *Paradise Lost*) a thoroughfare, like a three-stalled stable, for the idle rabble of Westminster to pass backwards and forwards to it with their cloven hoofs. Let us not, however, be getting on too fast—Milton himself taught school! There is something not altogether dissimilar between Mr. Bentham's appearance, and the portraits of Milton, the same silvery tone, a few dishevelled hairs, a peevish, yet puritanical expression, an irritable temperament corrected by habit and discipline. Or in modern times, he is something between Franklin and Charles Fox, with the comfortable double-chin and sleek thriving look of the one, and the quivering lip, the restless eye, and animated acuteness of the other. His eye is quick and lively; but it glances not from object to object, but from thought to thought. He is evidently a man occupied with some train of fine and inward association. He re-

gards the people about him no more than the flies of a summer. He meditates the coming age. He hears and sees only what suits his purpose, or some "foregone conclusion;" and looks out for facts and passing occurrences in order to put them into his logical machinery and grind them into the dust and powder of some subtle theory, as the miller looks out for grist to his mill! Add to this physiognomical sketch the minor points of costume, the open shirt-collar, the single-breasted coat, the old-fashioned half-boots and ribbed stockings; and you will find in Mr. Bentham's general appearance a singular mixture of boyish simplicity and of the venerableness of age. In a word, our celebrated jurist presents a striking illustration of the difference between the *philosophical* and the *regal* look; that is, between the merely abstracted and the merely personal. There is a lack-adaisical *bonhommie* about his whole aspect, none of the fierceness of pride or power; an unconscious neglect of his own person, instead of a stately assumption of superiority; a good-humoured, placid intelli-

gence, instead of a lynx-eyed watchfulness, as if it wished to make others its prey, or was afraid they might turn and rend him ; he is a beneficent spirit, prying into the universe, not lording it over it ; a thoughtful spectator of the scenes of life, or ruminator on the fate of mankind, not a painted pageant, a stupid idol set up on its pedestal of pride for men to fall down and worship with idiot fear and wonder at the thing themselves have made, and which, without that fear and wonder, would in itself be nothing !

Mr. Bentham, perhaps, over-rates the importance of his own theories. He has been heard to say (without any appearance of pride or affectation) that “ he should like to live the remaining years of his life, a year at a time at the end of the next six or eight centuries, to see the effect which his writings would by that time have had upon the world.” Alas ! his name will hardly live so long ! Nor do we think, in point of fact, that Mr. Bentham has given any new or decided impulse to the human mind. He cannot be looked upon in the light of a discoverer in legislation or mo-

rals. He has not struck out any great leading principle or parent-truth, from which a number of others might be deduced ; nor has he enriched the common and established stock of intelligence with original observations, like pearls thrown into wine. One truth discovered is immortal, and entitles its author to be so : for, like a new substance in nature, it cannot be destroyed. But Mr. Bentham's *forte* is arrangement ; and the form of truth, though not its essence, varies with time and circumstance. He has methodised, collated, and condensed all the materials prepared to his hand on the subjects of which he treats, in a masterly and scientific manner ; but we should find a difficulty in adducing from his different works (however elaborate or closely reasoned) any new element of thought, or even a new fact or illustration. His writings are, therefore, chiefly valuable as *books of reference*, as bringing down the account of intellectual inquiry to the present period, and disposing the results in a compendious, connected, and tangible shape ; but books of reference are chiefly serviceable for facilita-

ting the acquisition of knowledge, and are constantly liable to be superseded and to grow out of fashion with its progress, as the scaffolding is thrown down as soon as the building is completed. Mr. Bentham is not the first writer (by a great many) who has assumed the principle of UTILITY as the foundation of just laws, and of all moral and political reasoning:—his merit is, that he has applied this principle more closely and literally; that he has brought all the objections and arguments, more distinctly labelled and ticketed, under this one head, and made a more constant and explicit reference to it at every step of his progress, than any other writer. Perhaps the weak side of his conclusions also is, that he has carried this single view of his subject too far, and not made sufficient allowance for the varieties of human nature, and the caprices and irregularities of the human will. “He has not allowed for the *wind*.” It is not that you can be said to see his favourite doctrine of Utility glittering every where through his system, like a vein of rich, shining ore (that is not the nature of the material)—but it might

he plausibly objected that he had struck the whole mass of fancy, prejudice, passion, sense, whim, with his petrific, leaden mace, that he had “bound volatile Hermes,” and reduced the theory and practice of human life to a *caput mortuum* of reason, and dull, plodding, technical calculation. The gentleman is himself a capital logician; and he has been led by this circumstance to consider man as a logical animal. We fear this view of the matter will hardly hold water. If we attend to the *moral* man the constitution of his mind will scarcely be found to be built up of pure reason and a regard to consequences: if we consider the *criminal* man (with whom the legislator has chiefly to do) it will be found to be still less so.

Every pleasure, says Mr. Bentham, is equally a good, and is to be taken into the account as such in a moral estimate, whether it be the pleasure of sense or of conscience, whether it arise from the exercise of virtue or the perpetration of crime. We are afraid the human mind does not readily come into this doctrine, this *ultima ratio philosophorum*, interpreted

according to the letter. Our moral sentiments are made up of sympathies and antipathies, of sense and imagination, of understanding and prejudice. The soul, by reason of its weakness, is an aggregating and exclusive principle; it clings obstinately to some things, and violently rejects others. And it must do so, in a great measure, or it would act contrary to its own nature. It needs helps and stages in its progress, and “all appliances and means to boot,” which can raise it to a partial conformity to truth and good (the utmost it is capable of) and bring it into a tolerable harmony with the universe. By aiming at too much, by dismissing collateral aids, by extending itself to the farthest verge of the conceivable and possible, it loses its elasticity and vigour, its impulse and its direction. The moralist can no more do without the intermediate use of rules and principles, without the vantage ground of habit, without the levers of the understanding, than the mechanist can discard the use of wheels and pulleys, and perform every thing by simple motion. If the mind of man were competent to com-

prehend the whole of truth and good, and act upon it at once, and independently of all other considerations, Mr. Bentham's plan would be a feasible one, and *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth* would be the best possible ground to place morality upon. But it is not so. In ascertaining the rules of moral conduct, we must have regard not merely to the nature of the object, but to the capacity of the agent, and to his fitness for apprehending or attaining it. Pleasure is that which is so in itself : good is that which approves itself as such on reflection, or the idea of which is a source of satisfaction. All pleasure is not, therefore (morally speaking) equally a good ; for all pleasure does not equally bear reflecting on. There are some tastes that are sweet in the mouth and bitter in the belly ; and there is a similar contradiction and anomaly in the mind and heart of man. Again, what would become of the *Posthæc meminisse juvabit* of the poet, if a principle of fluctuation and reaction is not inherent in the very constitution of our nature, or if all moral truth is a mere literal truism ?

We are not, then, so much to inquire what certain things are abstractedly or in themselves, as how they affect the mind, and to approve or condemn them accordingly. The same object seen near strikes us more powerfully than at a distance : things thrown into masses give a greater blow to the imagination than when scattered and divided into their component parts. A number of mole-hills do not make a mountain, though a mountain is actually made up of atoms : so moral truth must present itself under a certain aspect and from a certain point of view, in order to produce its full and proper effect upon the mind. The laws of the affections are as necessary as those of optics. A calculation of consequences is no more equivalent to a sentiment, than a *seriatim* enumeration of square yards or feet touches the fancy like the sight of the Alps or Andes !

To give an instance or two of what we mean. Those who on pure cosmopolite principles, or on the ground of abstract humanity affect an extraordinary regard for the Turks and Tartars, have been accused of neglecting their

duties to their friends and next-door neighbours. Well, then, what is the state of the question here? One human being is, no doubt, as much worth in himself, independently of the circumstances of time or place, as another; but he is not of so much value to us and our affections. Could our imagination take wing (with our speculative faculties) to the other side of the globe or to the ends of the universe, could our eyes behold whatever our reason teaches us to be possible, could our hands reach as far as our thoughts or wishes, we might then busy ourselves to advantage with the Hottentots, or hold intimate converse with the inhabitants of the Moon; but being as we are, our feelings evaporate in so large a space—we must draw the circle of our affections and duties somewhat closer—the heart hovers and fixes nearer home. It is true, the bands of private, or of local and natural affection are often, nay in general, too tightly strained, so as frequently to do harm instead of good: but the present question is whether we can, with safety and effect, be wholly emancipated from them? Whether

we should shake them off at pleasure and without mercy, as the only bar to the triumph of truth and justice? Or whether benevolence, constructed upon a logical scale, would not be merely *nominal*, whether duty, raised to too lofty a pitch of refinement, might not sink into callous indifference or hollow selfishness? Again, is it not to exact too high a strain from humanity, to ask us to qualify the degree of abhorrence we feel against a murderer by taking into our cool consideration the pleasure he may have in committing the deed, and in the prospect of gratifying his avarice or his revenge? We are hardly so formed as to sympathise at the same moment with the assassin and his victim. The degree of pleasure the former may feel, instead of extenuating, aggravates his guilt, and shows the depth of his malignity. Now the mind revolts against this by mere natural antipathy, if it is itself well-disposed; or the slow process of reason would afford but a feeble resistance to violence and wrong. The will, which is necessary to give consistency and promptness to our good intentions, cannot extend so much,

candour and courtesy to the antagonist principle of evil : virtue, to be sincere and practical, cannot be divested entirely of the blindness and impetuosity of passion! It has been made a plea (half jest, half earnest) for the horrors of war, that they promote trade and manufactures. It has been said, as a set-off for the atrocities practised upon the negro slaves in the West Indies, that without their blood and sweat, so many millions of people could not have sugar to sweeten their tea. Fires and murders have been argued to be beneficial, as they serve to fill the newspapers, and for a subject to talk of—this is a sort of sophistry that it might be difficult to disprove on the bare scheme of contingent utility; but on the ground that we have stated, it must pass for a mere irony. What the proportion between the good and the evil will really be found in any of the supposed cases, may be a question to the understanding; but to the imagination and the heart, that is, to the natural feelings of mankind, it admits of none!

Mr. Bentham, in adjusting the provisions of a penal code, lays too little stress on the co-

operation of the natural prejudices of mankind, and the habitual feelings of that class of persons for whom they are more particularly designed. Legislators (we mean writers on legislation) are philosophers, and governed by their reason : criminals for whose control laws are made, are a set of desperadoes, governed only by their passions. What wonder that so little progress has been made towards a mutual understanding between the two parties ! They are quite a different species, and speak a different language, and are sadly at a loss for a common interpreter between them. Perhaps the Ordinary of Newgate bids as fair for this office as any one. What should Mr. Bentham, sitting at ease in his arm-chair, composing his mind before he begins to write by a prelude on the organ, and looking out at a beautiful prospect when he is at a loss for an idea, know of the principles of action of rogues, outlaws, and vagabonds ? No more than Montaigne of the motions of his cat ! If sanguine and tender-hearted philanthropists have set on foot an inquiry into the barbarity and the defects of penal laws, the practical im-

provements have been mostly suggested by reformed cut-throats, turnkeys, and thief-takers. What even can the Honourable House, who when the Speaker has pronounced the well-known, wished-for sound "That this house do now adjourn," retire, after voting a royal crusade or a loan of millions, to lie on down, and feed on plate in spacious palaces, know of what passes in the hearts of wretches in garrets and night-cellars, petty pilferers and marauders, who cut throats and pick pockets with their own hands? The thing is impossible. The laws of the country are, therefore, ineffectual and abortive, because they are made by the rich for the poor, by the wise for the ignorant, by the respectable and exalted in station for the very scum and refuse of the community. If Newgate would resolve itself into a committee of the whole Press-yard, with Jack Ketch at its head, aided by confidential persons from the country prisons or the Hulks, and would make a clear breast, some *data* might be found out to proceed upon; but as it is, the *criminal mind* of the country is a book sealed, no one has been able to pene-

trate to the inside ! Mr. Bentham, in his attempts to revise and amend our criminal jurisprudence, proceeds entirely on his favourite principle of utility. Convince highwaymen and house-breakers that it will be for their interest to reform, and they will reform and lead honest lives ; according to Mr. Bentham. He says, “ All men act from calculation, even madmen reason.” And, in our opinion, he might as well carry this maxim to Bedlam or St. Luke’s, and apply it to the inhabitants, as think to coerce or overawe the inmates of a gaol, or those whose practices make them candidates for that distinction, by the mere dry, detailed convictions of the understanding. Criminals are not to be influenced by reason ; for it is of the very essence of crime to disregard consequences both to ourselves and others. You may as well preach philosophy to a drunken man, or to the dead, as to those who are under the instigation of any mischievous passion. A man is a drunkard, and you tell him he ought to be sober ; he is debauched, and you ask him to reform ; he is idle, and you recommend industry to

him as his wisest course; he gambles, and you remind him that he may be ruined by this foible; he has lost his character, and you advise him to get into some reputable service or lucrative situation; vice becomes a habit with him, and you request him to rouse himself and shake it off; he is starving, and you warn him that if he breaks the law, he will be hanged. None of this reasoning reaches the mark it aims at. The culprit, who violates and suffers the vengeance of the laws, is not the dupe of ignorance, but the slave of passion, the victim of habit or necessity. To argue with strong passion, with inveterate habit, with desperate circumstances, is to talk to the winds. Clownish ignorance may indeed be dispelled, and taught better; but it is seldom that a criminal is not aware of the consequences of his act, or has not made up his mind to the alternative. They are, in general, *too knowing by half*. You tell a person of this stamp what is his interest; he says he does not care about his interest, or the world and he differ on that particular. But there is one point on which he must agree with them,

namely, what *they* think of his conduct, and that is the only hold you have of him. A man may be callous and indifferent to what happens to himself; but he is never indifferent to public opinion, or proof against open scorn and infamy. Shame, then, not fear, is the sheet-anchor of the law. He who is not afraid of being pointed at as a *thief*, will not mind a month's hard labour. He who is prepared to take the life of another, is already reckless of his own. But every one makes a sorry figure in the pillory; and the being launched from the New Drop lowers a man in his own opinion. The lawless and violent spirit, who is hurried by headstrong self-will to break the laws, does not like to have the ground of pride and obstinacy struck from under his feet. This is what gives the *swells* of the metropolis such a dread of the *tread-mill*,—it makes them ridiculous. It must be confessed, that this very circumstance renders the reform of criminals nearly hopeless. It is the apprehension of being stigmatised by public opinion, the fear of what will be thought and said of them, that deters men from the viola-

tion of the laws, while their character remains unimpeached; but honour once lost, all is lost. The man can never be himself again! A citizen is like a soldier, a part of a machine, who submits to certain hardships, privations, and dangers, not for his own ease, pleasure, profit, or even conscience, but—*for shame*. What is it that keeps the machine together in either case? Not punishment or discipline, but sympathy. The soldier mounts the breach or stands in the trenches, the peasant hedges and ditches, or the mechanic plies his ceaseless task, because the one will not be called a *coward*, the other a *rogue*: but let the one turn deserter and the other vagabond, and there is an end of him. The grinding law of necessity, which is no other than a name, a breath, loses its force; he is no longer sustained by the good opinion of others, and he drops out of his place in society, a useless clog! Mr. Bentham takes a culprit, and puts him into what he calls a *Panopticon*, that is, a sort of circular prison, with open cells, like a glass bee-hive. He sits in the middle, and sees all the other does.

He gives him work to do, and lectures him if he does not do it. He takes liquor from him, and society, and liberty; but he feeds and clothes him, and keeps him out of mischief; and when he has convinced him, by force and reason together, that this life is for his good, he turns him out upon the world a reformed man, and as confident of the success of his handy-work, as the shoemaker of that which he has just taken off the last, or the Parisian barber in Sterne of the buckle of his wig. “Dip it in the ocean,” said the perruquier. “and it will stand!” But we doubt the durability of our projector’s patchwork. Will our convert to the great principle of utility work when he is from under Mr. Bentham’s eye, because he was forced to work when under it? Will he keep sober, because he has been kept from liquor so long? Will he not return to loose company, because he has had the pleasure of sitting *vis-à-vis* with a philosopher of late? Will he not steal, now that his hands are untied? Will he not take the road, now that it is free to him? Will he not call his benefactor all the names he can

set his tongue to, the moment his back is turned? All this is more than to be feared. The charm of criminal life, like that of savage life, consists in liberty, in hardship, in danger, and in the contempt of death, in one word, in extraordinary excitement; and he who has tasted of it, will no more return to regular habits of life, than a man will take to water after drinking brandy, or than a wild beast will give over hunting its prey. Miracles never cease, to be sure; but they are not to be had wholesale, or *to order*. Mr. Owen, who is another of these proprietors and patentees of reform, has lately got an American savage with him, whom he carries about in great triumph and complacency, as an antithesis to his *New View of Society*, and as winding up his reasoning to what it mainly wanted, an epigrammatic point. Does the benevolent visionary of the Lanark cotton-mills really think this *natural man* will act as a foil to his *artificial man*? Does he for a moment imagine that his *address to the higher and middle classes*, with all its advantages of fiction, makes any thing like so interesting a romance as *Hunter's*

Captivity among the North American Indians? Has he any thing to show, in all the apparatus of New Lanark and its desolate monotony, to excite the thrill of imagination like the blankets made of wreaths of snow under which the wild wood-rovers bury themselves for weeks in winter? Or the skin of a leopard, which our hardy adventurer slew, and which served him for great coat and bedding? Or the rattle-snake that he found by his side as a bed-fellow? Or his rolling himself into a ball to escape from him? Or his suddenly placing himself against a tree to avoid being trampled to death by the herd of wild buffaloes, that came rushing on like the sound of thunder? Or his account of the huge spiders that prey on blue-bottles and gilded flies in green pathless forests; or of the great Pacific Ocean, that the natives look upon as the gulf that parts time from eternity, and that is to waft them to the spirits of their fathers? After all this, Mr. Hunter must find Mr. Owen and his parallelograms trite and flat, and will, we suspect, take an opportunity to escape from them!

Mr. Bentham's method of reasoning, though

comprehensive and exact, labours under the defect of most systems—it is too *topical*. It includes every thing; but it includes every thing alike. It is rather like an inventory, than a valuation of different arguments. Every possible suggestion finds a place, so that the mind is distracted as much as enlightened by this perplexing accuracy. The exceptions seem as important as the rule. By attending to the minute, we overlook the great; and in summing up an account, it will not do merely to insist on the number of items without considering their amount. Our author's page presents a very nicely dovetailed mosaic pavement of legal commonplaces. We slip and slide over its even surface without being arrested any where. Or his view of the human mind resembles a map, rather than a picture: the outline, the disposition is correct, but it wants colouring and relief. There is a technicality of manner, which renders his writings of more value to the professional inquirer than to the general reader. Again, his style is unpopular, not to say unintelligible. He writes a language of

his own, that *darkens knowledge*. His works have been translated into French—they ought to be translated into English. People wonder that Mr. Bentham has not been prosecuted for the boldness and severity of some of his invectives. He might wrap up high treason in one of his inextricable periods, and it would never find its way into Westminster-Hall. He is a kind of Manuscript author—he writes a cipher-hand, which the vulgar have no key to. The construction of his sentences is a curious framework with pegs and hooks to hang his thoughts upon, for his own use and guidance, but almost out of the reach of every body else. It is a barbarous philosophical jargon, with all the repetitions, parentheses, formalities, uncouth nomenclature and verbiage of law-Latin; and what makes it worse, it is not mere verbiage, but has a great deal of acuteness and meaning in it, which you would be glad to pick out if you could. In short, Mr. Bentham writes as if he was allowed but a single sentence to express his whole view of a subject in, and as if, should he omit a single circumstance or

step of the argument, it would be lost to the world for ever, like an estate by a flaw in the title-deeds. This is over-rating the importance of our own discoveries, and mistaking the nature and object of language altogether. Mr. Bentham has *acquired* this disability—it is not natural to him. His admirable little work *On Usury*, published forty years ago, is clear, easy, and vigorous. But Mr. Bentham has shut himself up since then “in nook monastic,” conversing only with followers of his own, or with “men of Ind,” and has endeavoured to overlay his natural humour, sense, spirit, and style with the dust and cobwebs of an obscure solitude. The best of it is, he thinks his present mode of expressing himself perfect, and that whatever may be objected to his law or logic, no one can find the least fault with the purity, simplicity, and perspicuity of his style.

Mr. Bentham, in private life, is an amiable and exemplary character. He is a little romantic, or so; and has dissipated part of a handsome fortune in practical speculations. He lends an ear to plausible projectors, and,

if he cannot prove them to be wrong in their premises or their conclusions, thinks himself bound *in reason* to stake his money on the venture. Strict logicians are licensed visionaries. Mr. Bentham is half-brother to the late Mr. Speaker Abbott*—*Proh pudor!* He was educated at Eton, and still takes our novices to task about a passage in Homer, or a metre in Virgil. He was afterwards at the University, and he has described the scruples of an ingenuous youthful mind about subscribing the articles, in a passage in his *Church-of-Englandism*, which smacks of truth and honour both, and does one good to read it in an age, when “to be honest (or not to laugh at the very idea of honesty) is to be one man picked out of ten thousand!” Mr. Bentham relieves his mind sometimes, after the fatigue of study, by playing on a fine old organ, and has a relish for Hogarth’s prints. He turns wooden utensils in a lathe for exercise, and fancies he can turn men in the same manner. He has no great fondness for poetry, and can hardly extract a moral out of

* Now Lord Colchester.

Shakspeare. His house is warmed and lighted by steam.. He is one of those who prefer the artificial to the natural in most things, and think the mind of man omnipotent. He has a great contempt for out-of-door prospects, for green fields and trees, and is for referring every thing to Utility. There is a little narrowness in this; for if all the sources of satisfaction are taken away, what is to become of utility itself? It is, indeed, the great fault of this able and extraordinary man, that he has concentrated his faculties and feelings too entirely on one subject and pursuit, and has not “looked enough abroad into universality.*”

* Lord Bacon's Advancement of Learning.

WILLIAM GODWIN.

THE Spirit of the Age was never more fully shown than in its treatment of this writer—its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day. Five-and-twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme,

his name was not far off :—now he has sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality. Mr. Godwin, during his lifetime, has secured to himself the triumphs and the mortifications of an extreme notoriety and of a sort of posthumous fame. His bark, after being tossed in the revolutionary tempest, now raised to heaven by all the fury of popular breath, now almost dashed in pieces, and buried in the quicksands of ignorance, or scorched with the lightning of momentary indignation, at length floats on the calm wave that is to bear it down the stream of time. Mr. Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he is at the head of no cabal, he belongs to no party in the State, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while even to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world make a point (as Goldsmith used to say) of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed; he is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried; but the author

of *Political Justice* and of *Caleb Williams* can never die, his name is an abstraction in letters, his works are standard in the history of intellect. He is thought of now like any eminent writer a hundred-and-fifty years ago, or just as he will be a hundred-and-fifty years hence. He knows this, and smiles in silent mockery of himself, reposing on the monument of his fame—

“Sedet, in eternumque sedebit infelix ‘Thesens.’”

No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. Tom Paine was considered for the time as Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought. “Throw aside your books of chemistry,” said Wordsworth to a young man, a student in the Temple, “and read Godwin on Necessity.” Sad necessity! Fatal reverse! Is truth then so variable? Is it one thing at twenty, and another at forty? Is it at a burn-

ing heat in 1793, and below *zero* in 1814? Not so, in the name of manhood and of common sense! Let us pause here a little.—Mr. Godwin indulged in extreme opinions, and carried with him all the most sanguine and fearless understandings of the time. What then? Because those opinions were overcharged, were they therefore altogether groundless? Is the very God of our idolatry all of a sudden to become an abomination and an anathema? Could so many young men of talent, of education, and of principle, have been hurried away by what had neither truth, nor nature, not one particle of honest feeling nor the least show of reason in it? Is the *Modern Philosophy* (as it has been called) at one moment a youthful bride, and the next a withered beldame, like the false Duessa in Spenser? Or is the vaunted edifice of Reason, like his House of Pride, gorgeous in front, and dazzling to approach, while “its hinder parts are ruinous, decayed, and old?” Has the main prop, which supported the mighty fabric, been shaken and given way under the strong grasp of some Samson; or has it not rather

been undermined by rats and vermin? At one time, it almost seemed, that “if this failed,

THE PILLAR'D FIRMAMENT

“The pillar'd firmament was rottenness,
And earth's base built of stubble:”

now scarce a shadow of it remains, it is crumbled to dust, nor is it even talked of! “What then, went ye forth for to see, a reed shaken with the wind?” Was it for this that our young gownsmen of the greatest expectation and promise, versed in classic lore, steeped in dialectics, armed at all points for the foe, well read, well nurtured, well provided for, left the University and the prospect of lawn sleeves, tearing asunder the shackles of the free-born spirit, and the cobwebs of school-divinity, to throw themselves at the feet of the new Gamaliel, and learn wisdom from him? Was it for this, that students at the bar, acute, inquisitive, sceptical (here only wild enthusiasts), neglected for a while the paths of preferment and the law as too narrow, tortuous, and unseemly to bear the pure and broad light of reason? Was it for this, that

students in medicine missed their way to Lecturerships and the top of their profession, deeming lightly of the health of the body, and dreaming only of the renovation of society and the march of mind? Was it to this that Mr. Southey's *Inscriptions* pointed? to this that Mr. Coleridge's *Religious Musings* tended? Was it for this, that Mr. Godwin himself sat with arms folded, and, "like Cato, gave his little senate laws?" Or rather, like another Prospero, uttered syllables that with their enchanted breath were to change the world, and might almost stop the stars in their courses? Oh! and is all forgot? Is this sun of intellect blotted from the sky? Or has it suffered total eclipse? Or is it we who make the fancied gloom, by looking at it through the paltry, broken, stained fragments of our own interests and prejudices? Were we fools then, or are we dishonest now? Or was the impulse of the mind less likely to be true and sound when it arose from high thought and warm feeling, than afterwards, when it was warped and debased by the example, the vices, and follies of the world?

The fault, then, of Mr. Godwin's philosophy, in one word, was too much ambition—"by that sin fell the angels!" He conceived too nobly of his fellows (the most unpardonable crime against them, for there is nothing that annoys our self-love so much as being complimented on imaginary achievements, to which we are wholly unequal)—he raised the standard of morality above the reach of humanity, and by directing virtue to the most airy and romantic heights, made her path dangerous, solitary, and impracticable. The author of the *Political Justice* took abstract reason for the rule of conduct, and abstract good for its end. He places the human mind on an elevation, from which it commands a view of the whole line of moral consequences; and requires it to conform its acts to the larger and more enlightened conscience which it has thus acquired. He absolves man from the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority, private and local attachment, in order that he may devote himself to the boundless pursuit of universal benevolence. Mr. Godwin gives no quarter to the amiable weak-

nesses of our nature, nor does he stoop to avail himself of the supplementary aids of an imperfect virtue. Gratitude, promises, friendship, family affection give way, not that they may be merged in the opposite vices or in want of principle; but that the void may be filled up by the disinterested love of good, and the dictates of inflexible justice, which is "the law of laws, and sovereign of sovereigns." All minor considerations yield, in his system, to the stern sense of duty, as they do, in the ordinary and established ones, to the voice of necessity. Mr. Godwin's theory and that of more approved reasoners differ only in this, that what are with them the exceptions, the extreme cases, he makes the every-day rule. No one denies that on great occasions, in moments of fearful excitement, or when a mighty object is at stake, the lesser and merely instrumental points of duty are to be sacrificed without remorse at the shrine of patriotism, of honour, and of conscience. But the disciple of the *New School* (no wonder it found so many impugnors, even in its own bosom!) is to be always the hero of duty; the

law to which he has bound himself never swerves nor relaxes; his feeling of what is right is to be at all times wrought up to a pitch of enthusiastic self-devotion; he must become the unshrinking martyr and confessor of the public good. If it be said that this scheme is chimerical and impracticable on ordinary occasions, and to the generality of mankind; well and good; but those who accuse the author of having trampled on the common feelings and prejudices of mankind in wantonness or insult, or without wishing to substitute something better (and only unattainable, because it is better) in their stead, accuse him wrongfully. We may not be able to launch the bark of our affections on the ocean-tide of humanity, we may be forced to paddle along its shores, or shelter in its creeks and rivulets; but we have no right to reproach the bold and adventurous pilot, who dared us to tempt the uncertain abyss, with our own want of courage or of skill, or with the jealousies and impatience, which deter us from undertaking, or might prevent us from accomplishing the voyage!

The *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (it was urged by its favourers and defenders at the time, and may still be so, without either profaneness or levity) is a metaphysical and logical commentary on some of the most beautiful and striking texts of Scripture. Mr. Godwin is a mixture of the Stoic and of the Christian philosopher. To break the force of the vulgar objections and outcry that have been raised against the Modern Philosophy, as if it were a new and monstrous birth in morals, it may be worth noticing, that volumes of sermons have been written to excuse the founder of Christianity for not including friendship and private affection among its golden rules, but rather excluding them.* Moreover, the answer to the question, “Who is thy neighbour?” added to the divine precept, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” is the same as in the exploded pages of our author,—“He to whom we can do

* Shaftesbury made this an objection to Christianity, which was answered by Foster, Leland, and other eminent divines, on the ground that Christianity had a higher object in view, namely, general philanthropy.

most good." In determining this point, we were not to be influenced by any extrinsic or collateral considerations, by our own predilections, or the expectations of others, by our obligations to them or any services they might be able to render us, by the climate they were born in, by the house they lived in, by rank or religion, or party, or personal ties, but by the abstract merits, the pure and unbiassed justice of the case. The artificial helps and checks to moral conduct were set aside as spurious and unnecessary, and we came at once to the grand and simple question—"In what manner we could best contribute to the greatest possible good?" This was the paramount obligation in all cases whatever, from which we had no right to free ourselves upon any idle or formal pretext, and of which each person was to judge for himself, under the infallible authority of his own opinion and the inviolable sanction of his self-approbation. "There was the rub that made *philosophy* of so short life!" Mr. Godwin's definition of morals was the same as the admired one of law, *reason without passion*; but with the

unlimited scope of private opinion, and in a boundless field of speculation (for nothing less would satisfy the pretensions of the New School), there was danger that the unseasoned novice might substitute some pragmatical conceit of his own for the rule of right reason, and mistake a heartless indifference for a superiority to more natural and generous feelings. Our ardent and dauntless reformer followed out the moral of the parable of the Good Samaritan into its most rigid and repulsive consequences with a pen of steel, and let fall his "trenchant blade" on every vulnerable point of human infirmity; but there is a want in his system of the mild and persuasive tone of the Gospel, where "all is conscience and tender heart." Man was indeed screwed up, by mood and figure, into a logical machine, that was to forward the public good with the utmost punctuality and effect, and it might go very well on smooth ground and under favourable circumstances; but would it work up-hill or *against the grain*? It was to be feared that the proud Temple of Reason, which at a distance and in stately sup-

position shone like the palaces of the New Jerusalem, might (when placed on actual ground) be broken up into the sordid styres of sensuality, and the petty huckster's shops of self-interest! Every man (it was proposed—"so ran the tenour of the bond") was to be a Regulus, a Codrus, a Cato, or a Brutus—every woman a Mother of the Gracchi.

" ——— It was well said,
And 'tis a kind of good deed to say well."

But heroes on paper might degenerate into vagabonds in practice, Corinnas into courtezans. Thus a refined and permanent individual attachment is intended to supply the place and avoid the inconveniences of marriage; but vows of eternal constancy, without church security, are found to be fragile. A member of the *ideal* and perfect commonwealth of letters lends another a hundred pounds for immediate and pressing use; and when he applies for it again, the borrower has still more need of it than he, and retains it for his own especial, which is tantamount to the public good. The Exchequer of pure reason, like that of the State, never refunds. The

political as well as the religious fanatic appeals from the over-weening opinion and claims of others to the highest and most impartial tribunal, namely, his own breast. Two persons agree to live together in Chambers on principles of pure equality and mutual assistance—but when it comes to the push, one of them finds that the other always insists on his fetching water from the pump in Hare-court, and cleaning his shoes for him. A modest assurance was not the least indispensable virtue in the new perfectibility code; and it was hence discovered to be a scheme, like other schemes where there are all prizes and no blanks, for the accommodation of the enterprising and cunning, at the expense of the credulous and honest. This broke up the system, and left no good odour behind it! Reason has become a sort of by-word, and philosophy has “fallen first into a fasting, then into a sadness, then into a decline, and last, into the dissolution of which we all complain!” This is a worse error than the former: we may be said to have “lost the immortal part of ourselves, and what remains is beastly!”

The point of view from which this matter may be fairly considered, is two-fold, and may be stated thus:—In the first place, it by no means follows, because reason is found not to be the only infallible or safe rule of conduct, that it is no rule at all; or that we are to discard it altogether with derision and ignominy. On the contrary, if not the sole, it is the principal ground of action; it is “the guide, the stay and anchor of our purest thoughts, and soul of all our moral being.” In proportion as we strengthen and expand this principle, and bring our affections and subordinate, but perhaps more powerful, motives of action into harmony with it, it will not admit of a doubt that we advance to the goal of perfection, and answer the ends of our creation, those ends which not only morality enjoins, but which religion sanctions. If with the utmost stretch of reason, man cannot (as some seemed inclined to suppose) soar up to the God, and quit the ground of human frailty, yet, stripped wholly of it, he sinks at once into the brute. If it cannot stand alone, in its naked simplicity, but requires other props to

buttress it up, or ornaments to set it off; yet without it the moral structure would fall flat and dishonoured to the ground. Private reason is that which raises the individual above his mere animal instincts, appetites and passions: public reason in its gradual progress separates the savage from the civilized states. Without the one, men would resemble wild beasts in their dens; without the other, they would be speedily converted into hordes of barbarians or banditti. Sir Walter Scott, in his zeal to restore the spirit of loyalty, of passive obedience and non-resistance, as an acknowledgment for his having been created a Baronet by a Prince of the House of Brunswick, may think it a fine thing to return in imagination to the good old times, “when in Auvergne alone, there were three hundred nobles whose most ordinary actions were robbery, rape, and murder,” when the castle of each Norman baron was a strong hold from which the lordly proprietor issued to oppress and plunder the neighbouring districts, and when the Saxon peasantry were treated by their gay and gallant tyrants as a herd of loathsome swine—but

for our own parts we beg to be excused; we had rather live in the same age with the author of *Waverley* and *Blackwood's Magazine*. Reason is the meter and alnager in civil intercourse, by which each person's upstart and contradictory pretensions are weighed and approved or found wanting, and without which it could not subsist, any more than traffic or the exchange of commodities could be carried on without weights and measures. It is the medium of knowledge, and the polisher of manners, by creating common interests and ideas. Or in the words of a contemporary writer, "Reason is the queen of the moral world, the soul of the universe, the lamp of human life, the pillar of society, the foundation of law, the beacon of nations, the golden chain let down from heaven, which links all accountable and all intelligent natures in one common system—and in the vain strife between fanatic innovation and fanatic prejudice, we are exhorted to dethrone this queen of the world, to blot out this light of the mind, to deface this fair column, to break in pieces this golden chain! We are to discard and throw from us with

loud taunts and bitter execrations that reason, which has been the lofty theme of the philosopher, the poet, the moralist, and the divine, whose name was not first named to be abused by the enthusiasts of the French Revolution, or to be blasphemed by the madder enthusiasts, the advocates of Divine Right, but which is coeval with, and inseparable from the nature and faculties of man—is the image of his Maker stamped upon him at his birth, the understanding breathed into him with the breath of life, and in the participation and improvement of which alone he is raised above the brute creation and his own physical nature!” —The overstrained and ridiculous pretensions of monks and ascetics were never thought to justify a return to unbridled licence of manners, or the throwing aside of all decency. The hypocrisy, cruelty, and fanaticism, often attendant on peculiar professions of sanctity, have not banished the name of religion from the world. Neither can “the unreasonableness of the reason” of some modern sciolists “so unreason our reason,” as to debar us of the benefit of this principle in future, or

to disfranchise us of the highest privilege of our nature. In the second place, if it is admitted that Reason alone is not the sole and self-sufficient ground of morals, it is to Mr. Godwin that we are indebted for having settled the point. No one denied or distrusted this principle (before his time) as the absolute judge and interpreter in all questions of difficulty; and if this is no longer the case, it is because he has taken this principle, and followed it into its remotest consequences with more keenness of eye and steadiness of hand than any other expounder of ethics. His grand work is (at least) an *experimentum crucis* to show the weak sides and imperfections of human reason as the sole law of human action. By overshooting the mark, or by “flying an eagle flight, forth and right on,” he has pointed out the limit or line of separation, between what is practicable and what is barely conceivable—by imposing impossible tasks on the naked strength of the will, he has discovered how far it is or is not in our power to dispense with the illusions of sense, to resist the calls of affection, to emancipate

ourselves from the force of habit; and thus, though he has not said it himself, has enabled others to say to the towering aspirations after good, and to the over-bearing pride of human intellect—"Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!" Captain Parry would be thought to have rendered a service to navigation and his country, no less by proving that there is no North-West Passage, than if he had ascertained that there is one: so Mr. Godwin has rendered an essential service to moral science, by attempting (in vain) to pass the Arctic Circle and Frozen Regions, where the understanding is no longer warmed by the affections, nor fanned by the breeze of fancy! This is the effect of all bold, original, and powerful thinking, that it either discovers the truth, or detects where error lies; and the only crime with which Mr. Godwin can be charged as a political and moral reasoner is, that he has displayed a more ardent spirit, and a more independent activity of thought than others, in establishing the fallacy (if fallacy it be) of an old popular prejudice that *the Just and True were one*, by "championing it to the

Outrance," and in the final result placing the Gothic structure of human virtue on an humbler, but a wider and safer foundation than it had hitherto occupied in the volumes and systems of the learned.

Mr. Godwin is an inventor in the regions of romance, as well as a skilful and hardy explorer of those of moral truth. *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* are two of the most splendid and impressive works of the imagination that have appeared in our times. It is not merely that these novels are very well for a philosopher to have produced—they are admirable and complete in themselves, and would not lead you to suppose that the author, who is so entirely at home in human character and dramatic situation, had ever dabbled in logic or metaphysics. The first of these, particularly, is a master-piece, both as to invention and execution. The romantic and chivalrous principle of the love of personal fame is embodied in the finest possible manner in the character of Falkland;* as in Caleb

* Mr. Fuseli used to object to this striking delineation a want of historical correctness, inasmuch as the animating

Williams (who is not the first, but the second character in the piece) we see the very demon of curiosity personified. Perhaps the art with which these two characters are contrived to relieve and set off each other, has never been surpassed in any work of fiction, with the exception of the immortal satire of Cervantes. The restless and inquisitive spirit of Caleb Williams, in search and in possession of his patron's fatal secret, haunts the latter like a second conscience, plants stings in his tortured mind, fans the flame of his jealous ambition, struggling with agonized remorse ; and the hapless but noble-minded Falkland at length falls a martyr to the persecution of that morbid and overpowering interest, of which his mingled virtues and vices have rendered him the object. We conceive no one ever began *Caleb Williams* that did not read it through : no one that ever read it could possibly forget it, or speak of it after any length of time,

principle of the true chivalrous character was the sense of honour, not the mere regard to, or saving of, appearances. This, we think, must be an hypercriticism, from all we remember of books of chivalry and heroes of romance.

but with an impression as if the events and feelings had been personal to himself. This is the case also with the story of St. Leon, which, with less dramatic interest and intensity of purpose, is set off by a more gorgeous and flowing eloquence, and by a crown of preternatural imagery, that waves over it like a palm-tree! It is the beauty and the charm of Mr. Godwin's descriptions that the reader identifies himself with the author; and the secret of this is, that the author has identified himself with his personages. Indeed, he has created them. They are the proper issue of his brain, lawfully begot, not foundlings, nor the "bastards of his art." He is not an indifferent, callous spectator of the scenes which he himself portrays, but without seeming to feel them. There is no look of patch-work and plagiarism, the beggarly copiousness of borrowed wealth; no tracery-work from worm-eaten manuscripts, from forgotten chronicles, nor piecing out of vague traditions with fragments and snatches of old ballads, so that the result resembles a gaudy, staring transparency, in which you cannot distinguish the daubing of

the painter from the light that shines through the flimsy colours and gives them brilliancy. Here all is fairly made out with strokes of the pencil, by fair, not by factitious means. Our author takes a given subject from nature or from books, and then fills it up with the ardent workings of his own mind, with the teeming and audible pulses of his own heart. The effect is entire and satisfactory in proportion. The work (so to speak) and the author are one. We are not puzzled to decide upon their respective pretensions. In reading Mr. Godwin's novels, we know what share of merit the author has in them. In reading the *Scotch Novels*, we are perpetually embarrassed in asking ourselves this question; and perhaps it is not altogether a false modesty that prevents the editor from putting his name in the title-page—he is (for any thing we know to the contrary) only a more voluminous sort of Allen-a-Dale. At least, we may claim this advantage for the English author, that the chains with which he rivets our attention are forged out of his own thoughts, link by link, blow for blow, with glowing enthusiasm : we

see the genuine ore melted in the furnace of fervid feeling, and moulded into stately and *ideal* forms; and this is so far better than peeping into an old iron shop, or pilfering from a dealer in marine stores! There is one drawback, however, attending this mode of proceeding, which attaches generally, indeed, to all originality of composition; namely, that it has a tendency to a certain degree of monotony. He who draws upon his own resources, easily comes to an end of his wealth. Mr. Godwin, in all his writings, dwells upon one idea or exclusive view of a subject, aggrandises a sentiment, exaggerates a character, or pushes an argument to extremes, and makes up by the force of style and continuity of feeling for what he wants in variety of incident or ease of manner. This necessary defect is observable in his best works, and is still more so in *Fleetwood* and *Mandeville*; the one of which, compared with his more admired performances, is mawkish, and the other morbid. Mr. Godwin is also an essayist, an historian—in short, what is he not, that belongs to the

character of an indefatigable and accomplished author? His *Life of Chaucer* would have given celebrity to any man of letters possessed of three thousand a year, with leisure to write quartos : as the legal acuteness displayed in his *Remarks on Judge Eyre's Charge to the Jury* would have raised any briefless barrister to the height of his profession. This temporary effusion did more—it gave a turn to the trials for high treason in the year 1794, and possibly saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals, marked out as political victims to the Moloch of Legitimacy, which then skulked behind a British throne, and had not yet dared to stalk forth (as it has done since) from its lurking-place, in the face of day, to brave the opinion of the world. If it had then glutted its maw with its intended prey (the sharpness of Mr. Godwin's pen cut the legal cords with which it was attempted to bind them), it might have done so sooner, and with more lasting effect. The world do not know (and we are not sure but the intelligence may startle Mr. Godwin himself),

that he is the author of a volume of Sermons, and of a Life of Chatham.*

Mr. Fawcett (an old friend and fellow-student of our author, and who always spoke of his writings with admiration, tinged with wonder) used to mention a circumstance with respect to the last-mentioned work, which may throw some light on the history and progress of Mr. Godwin's mind. He was anxious to make his biographical account as complete as he could, and applied for this purpose to many of his acquaintance to furnish him with anecdotes or to suggest criticisms. Amongst others Mr. Fawcett repeated to him what he thought a striking passage in a speech on *General Warrants* delivered by Lord Chatham, at which he (Mr. Fawcett) had been present. "Every man's house (said this emphatic thinker and speaker) has been called his castle. And why is it called his castle? Is it because it is defended by a wall, because it is surrounded with a moat? No, it may be nothing more than a straw-built shed. It may

* We had forgotten the tragedies of Antonio and Ferdinand. Peace be with their *manes*!

be open to all the elements : the wind may enter in, the rain may enter in—but the king *cannot* enter in !” His friend thought that the point was here palpable enough : but when he came to read the printed volume, he found it thus *transposed* : “ Every man’s house is his castle. And why is it called so ? Is it because it is defended by a wall, because it is surrounded with a moat ? No, it may be nothing more than a straw-built shed. It may be exposed to all the elements : the rain may enter into it, *all the winds of Heaven may whistle round it*, but the king cannot, etc.” This was what Fawcett called a defect of *natural imagination*. He at the same time admitted that Mr. Godwin had improved his native sterility in this respect ; or atoned for it by incessant activity of mind and by accumulated stores of thought and powers of language. In fact, his *forte* is not the spontaneous, but the voluntary exercise of talent. He fixes his ambition on a high point of excellence, and spares no pains or time in attaining it. He has less of the appearance of a man of genius, than any one who has given

such decided and ample proofs of it. He is ready only on reflection : dangerous only at the rebound. He gathers himself up, and strains every nerve and faculty with deliberate aim to some heroic and dazzling achievement of intellect : but he must make a career before he flings himself, armed, upon the enemy, or he is sure to be unhorsed. Or he resembles an eight-day clock that must be wound up long before it can strike. Therefore, his powers of conversation are but limited. He has neither acuteness of remark, nor a flow of language, both which might be expected from his writings, as these are no less distinguished by a sustained and impassioned tone of declamation than by novelty of opinion or brilliant tracks of invention. In company, Horne Tooke used to make a mere child of him—or of any man ! Mr. Godwin liked this treatment,* and indeed it is his foible to fawn

* To be sure, it was redeemed by a high respect, and by some magnificent compliments. Once in particular, at his own table, after a good deal of *badinage* and cross-questioning about his being the author of the Reply to Judge Eyre's Charge, on Mr. Godwin's acknowledging that he was, Mr. Tooke

on those who use him *cavalierly*, and to be cavalier to those who express an undue or unqualified admiration of him. He looks up with unfeigned respect to acknowledged reputation (but then it must be very well ascertained before he admits it)—and has a favourite hypothesis that Understanding and Virtue are the same thing. Mr. Godwin possesses a high degree of philosophical candour, and studiously paid the homage of his pen and person to Mr. Malthus, Sir James Mackintosh, and Dr. Parr, for their unsparing attacks on him ; but woe to any poor devil who had the hardihood to defend him against them ! In private, the author of *Political Justice* at one time reminded those who knew him of the metaphysician engrafted on the Dissenting Minister. There was a dictatorial, captious, quibbling pettiness of manner. He lost this with the first blush and awkwardness of popularity, which surprised him in the retirement of his study ; and he has since, with the wear said, “ Come here then,”—and when his guest went round to his chair, he took his hand, and pressed it to his lips, saying—“ I can do no less for the hand that saved my life !”

and tear of society, from being too pragmatical, become somewhat too careless. He is, at present, as easy as an old glove. Perhaps there is a little attention to effect in this, and he wishes to appear a foil to himself. His best moments are with an intimate acquaintance or two, when he gossips in a fine vein about old authors, Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, or Burnet's *History of his own Times*; and you perceive by your host's talk, as by the taste of seasoned wine, that he has a *cellarage* in his understanding! Mr. Godwin also has a correct *acquired* taste in poetry and the drama. He relishes Donne and Ben Jonson, and recites a passage from either with an agreeable mixture of pedantry and *bon-homme*. He is not one of those who do not grow wiser with opportunity and reflection: he changes his opinions, and changes them for the better. The alteration of his taste in poetry, from an exclusive admiration of the age of Queen Anne to an almost equally exclusive one of that of Elizabeth, is, we suspect, owing to Mr. Coleridge, who, some twenty years ago, threw a great stone into the stand-

ing pool of criticism, which splashed some persons with the mud, but which gave a motion to the surface and a reverberation to the neighbouring echoes, which has not since subsided. In common company, Mr. Godwin either goes to sleep himself, or sets others to sleep. He is at present engaged in a History of the Commonwealth of England.—*Esto perpetua!* In size Mr. Godwin is below the common stature, nor is his deportment graceful or animated. His face is, however, fine, with an expression of placid temper and recondite thought. He is not unlike the common portraits of Locke. There is a very admirable likeness of him by Mr. Northcote, which with a more heroic and dignified air, only does justice to the profound sagacity and benevolent aspirations of our author's mind. Mr. Godwin has kept the best company of his time, but he has survived most of the celebrated persons with whom he lived in habits of intimacy. He speaks of them with enthusiasm and with discrimination; and sometimes dwells with peculiar delight on a day passed at John Kemble's in company with Mr. Sheri-

dan, Mr. Curran, Mrs. Wolstonecroft and Mrs. Inchbald, when the conversation took a most animated turn and the subject was of Love. Of all these our author is the only one remaining. Frail tenure, on which human life and genius are lent us for a while to improve or to enjoy!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

Hazlitt, William,

The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits

Bd.: 1

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